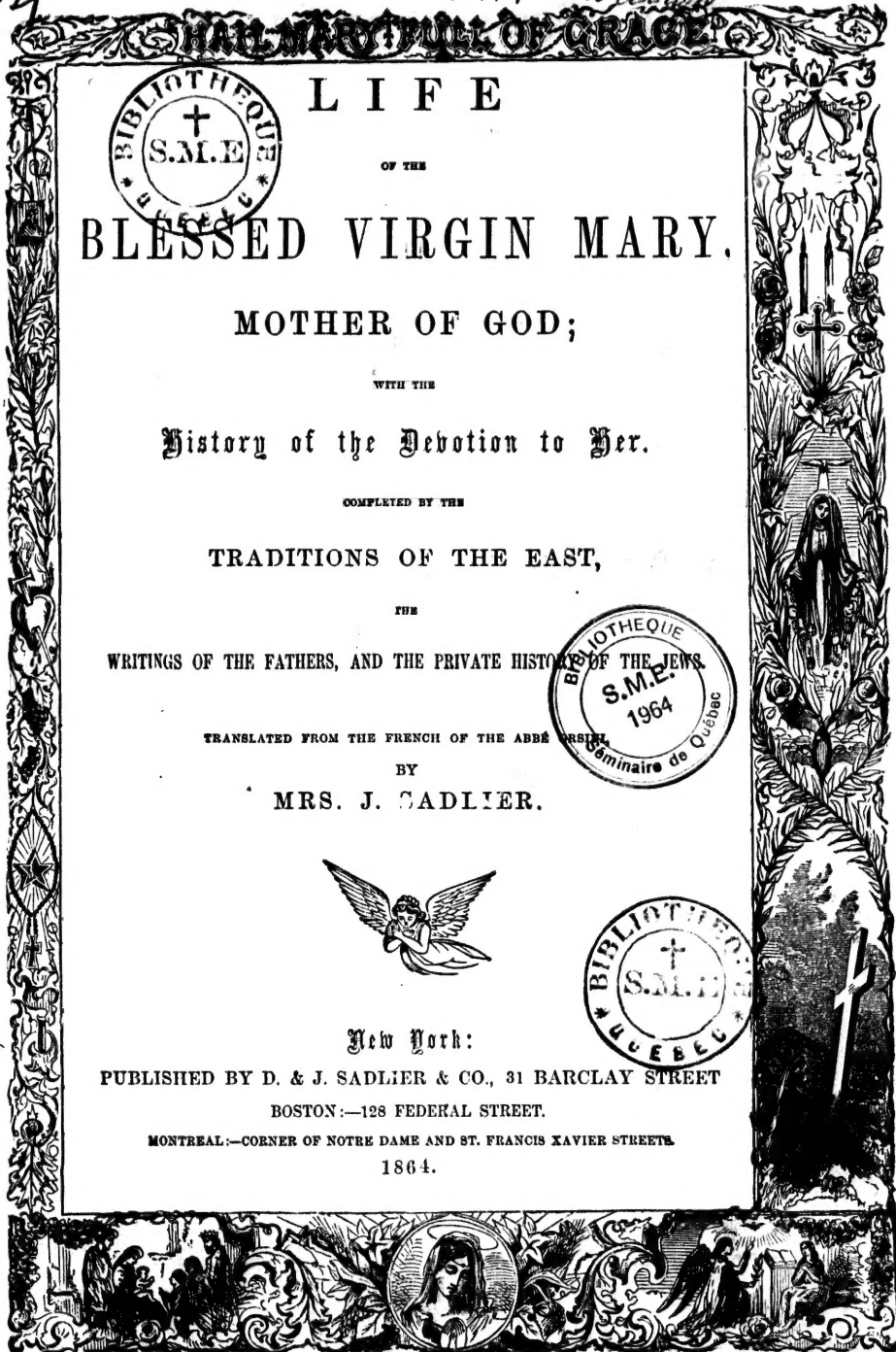


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L I F E

OF THE

BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

MOTHER OF GOD;

WITH THE

History of the Devotion to Her.

COMPLETED BY THE

TRADITIONS OF THE EAST,

FOR

WRITINGS OF THE FATHERS, AND THE PRIVATE HISTORY OF THE JEWS.



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF THE ABBE BRUNET.

BY

MRS. J. SADLIER.



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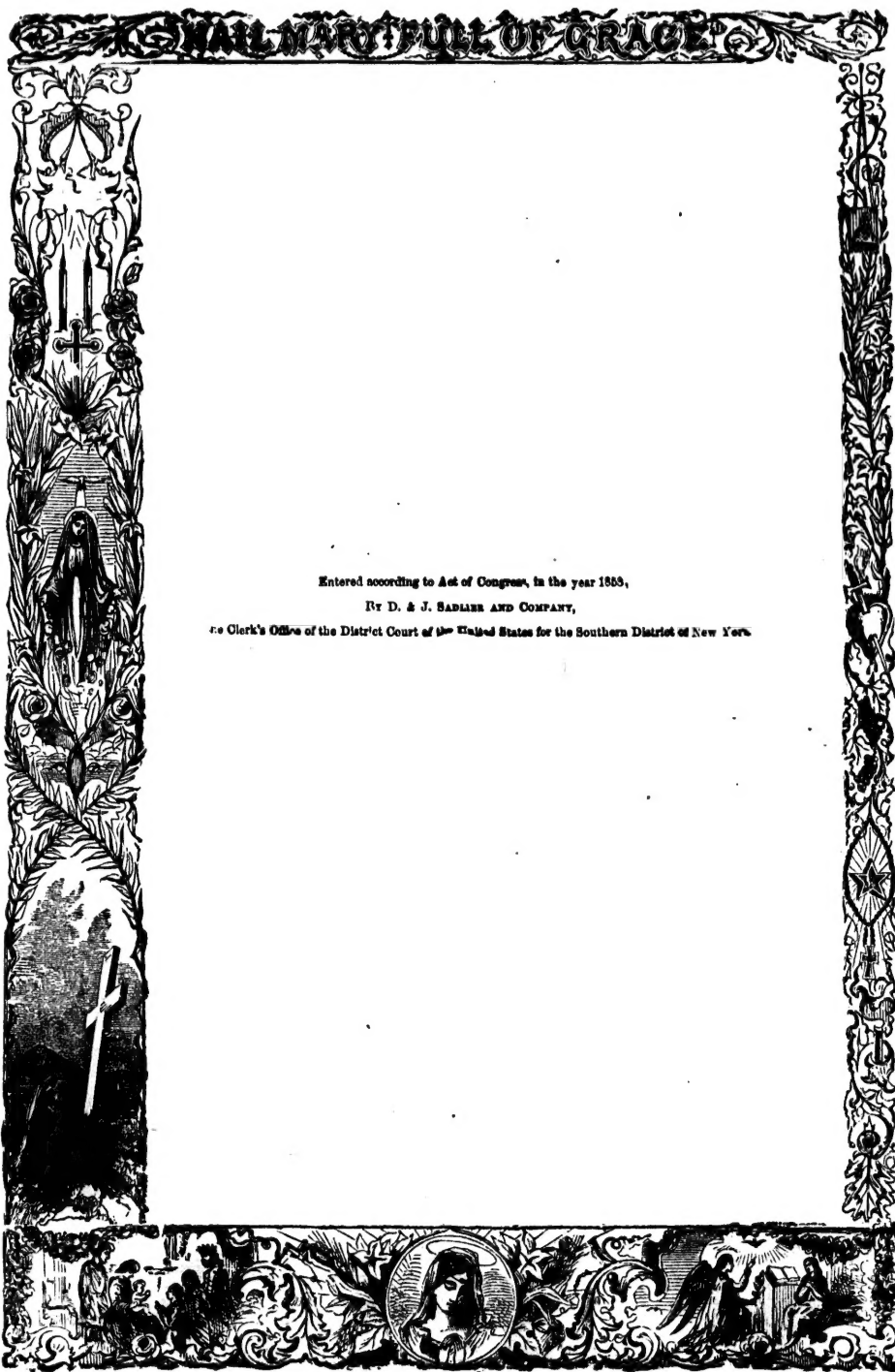
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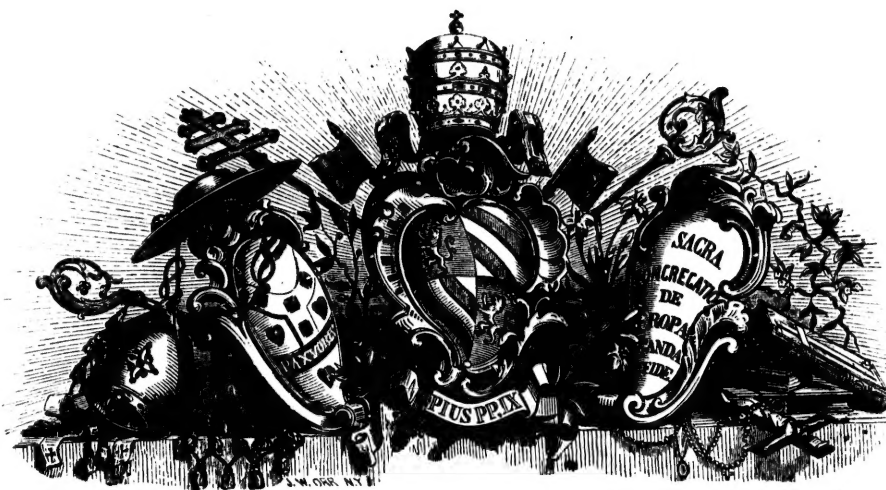
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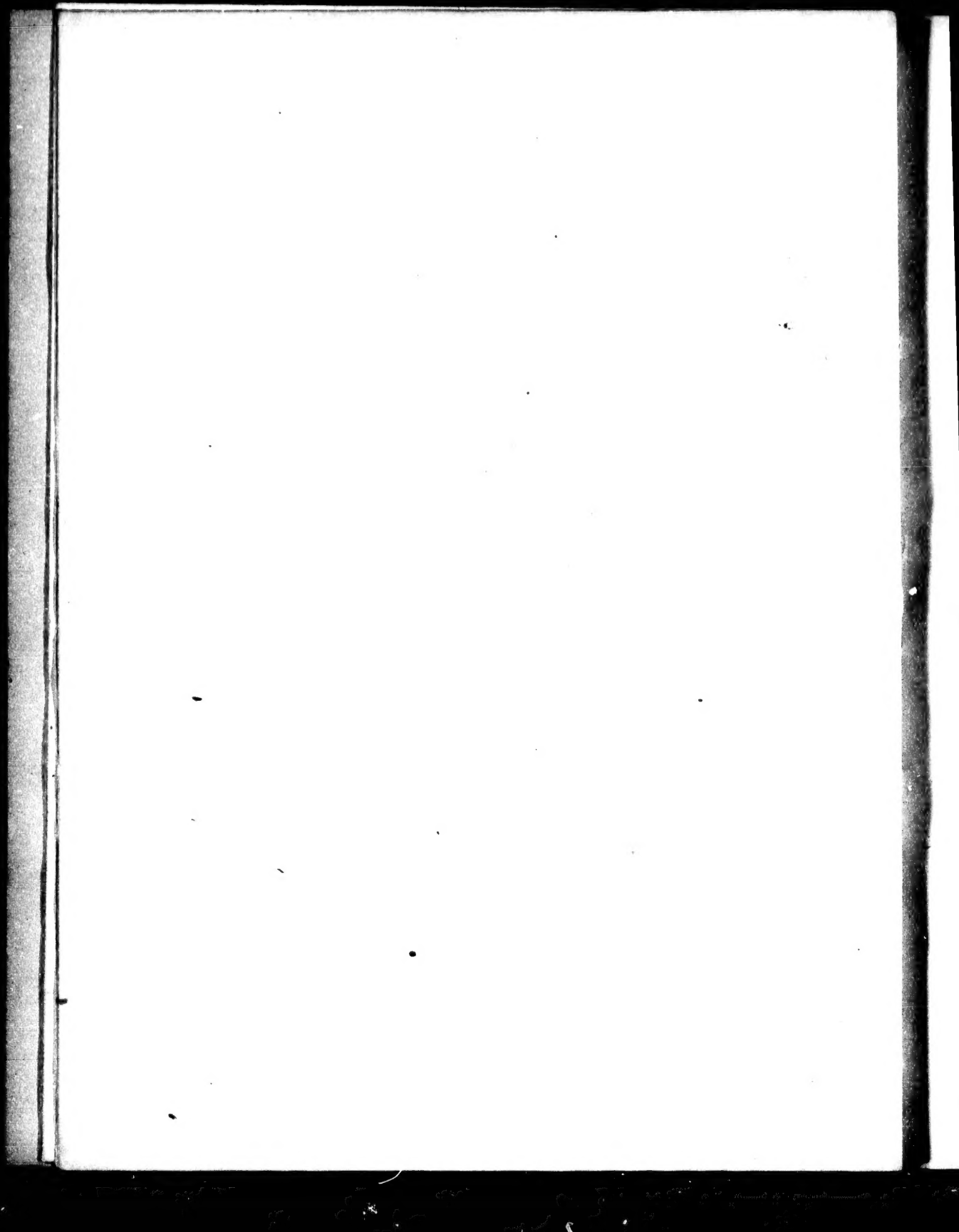
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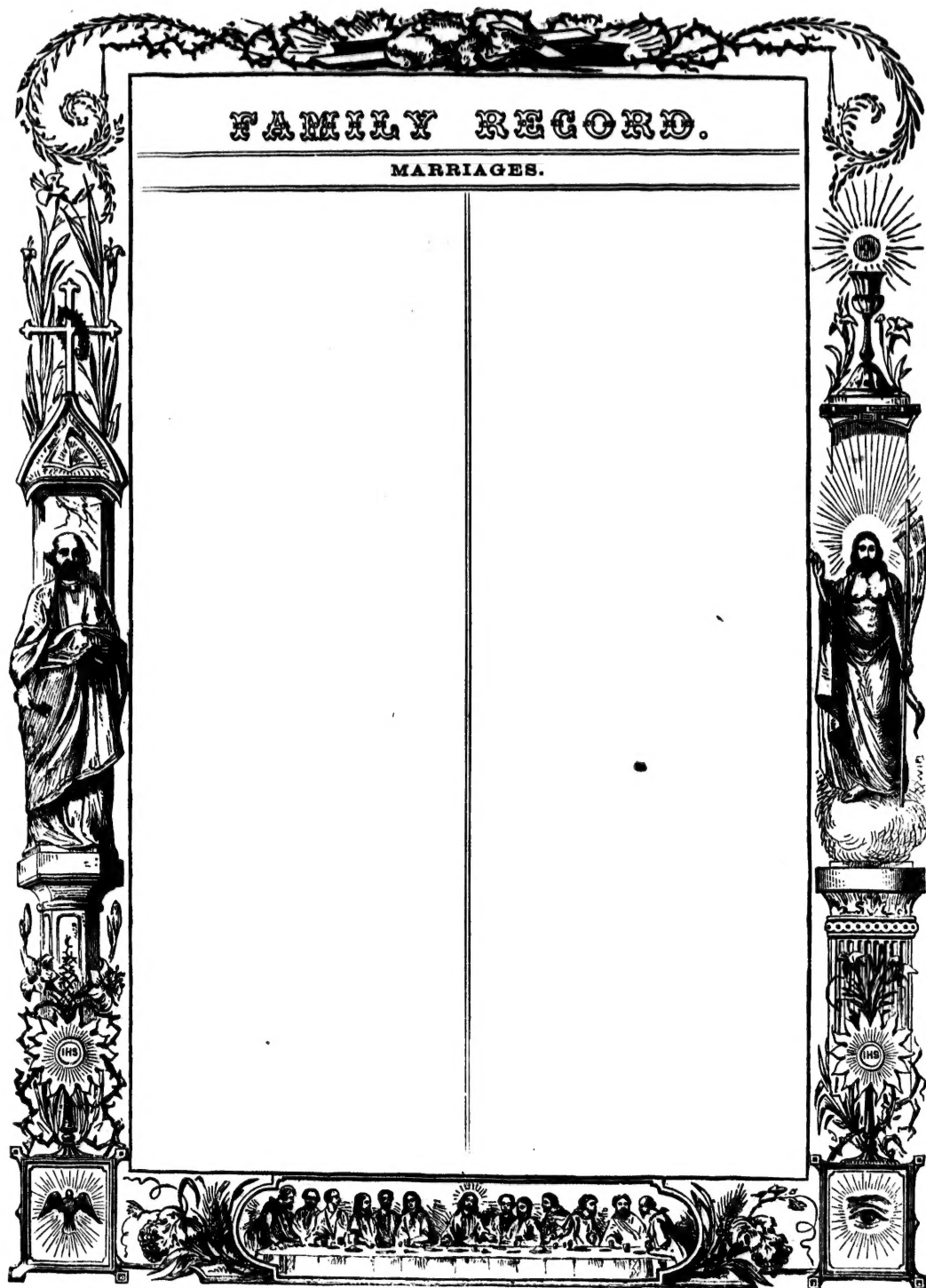


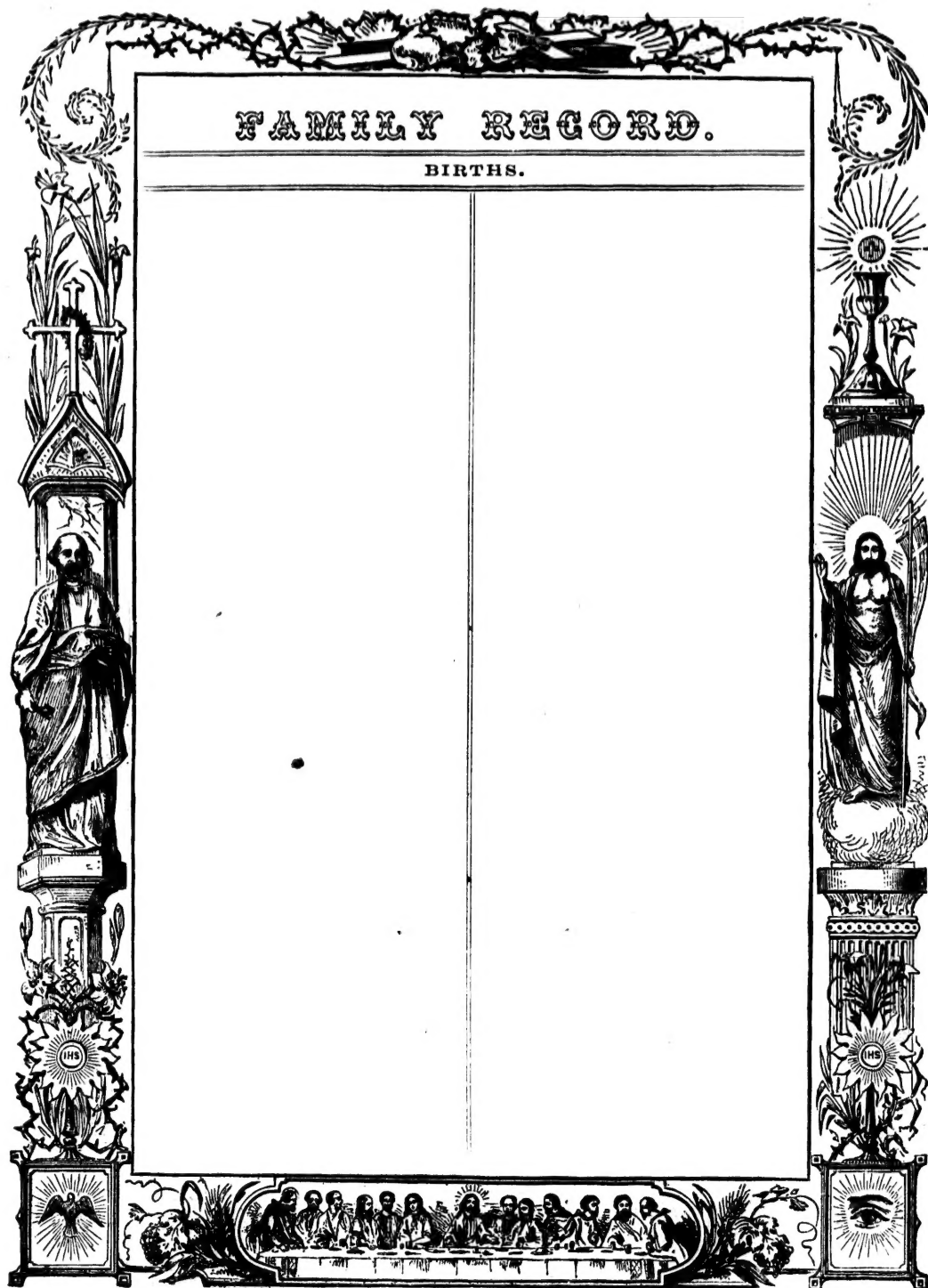
*We approve of the publication of the Hints of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of
God, and recommend it to the use of the Faithful.*

✠ JOHN,
Archbishop of New York.

NEW YORK. Feast of the Annunciation of B. V. Mary,
March 25th. 1855

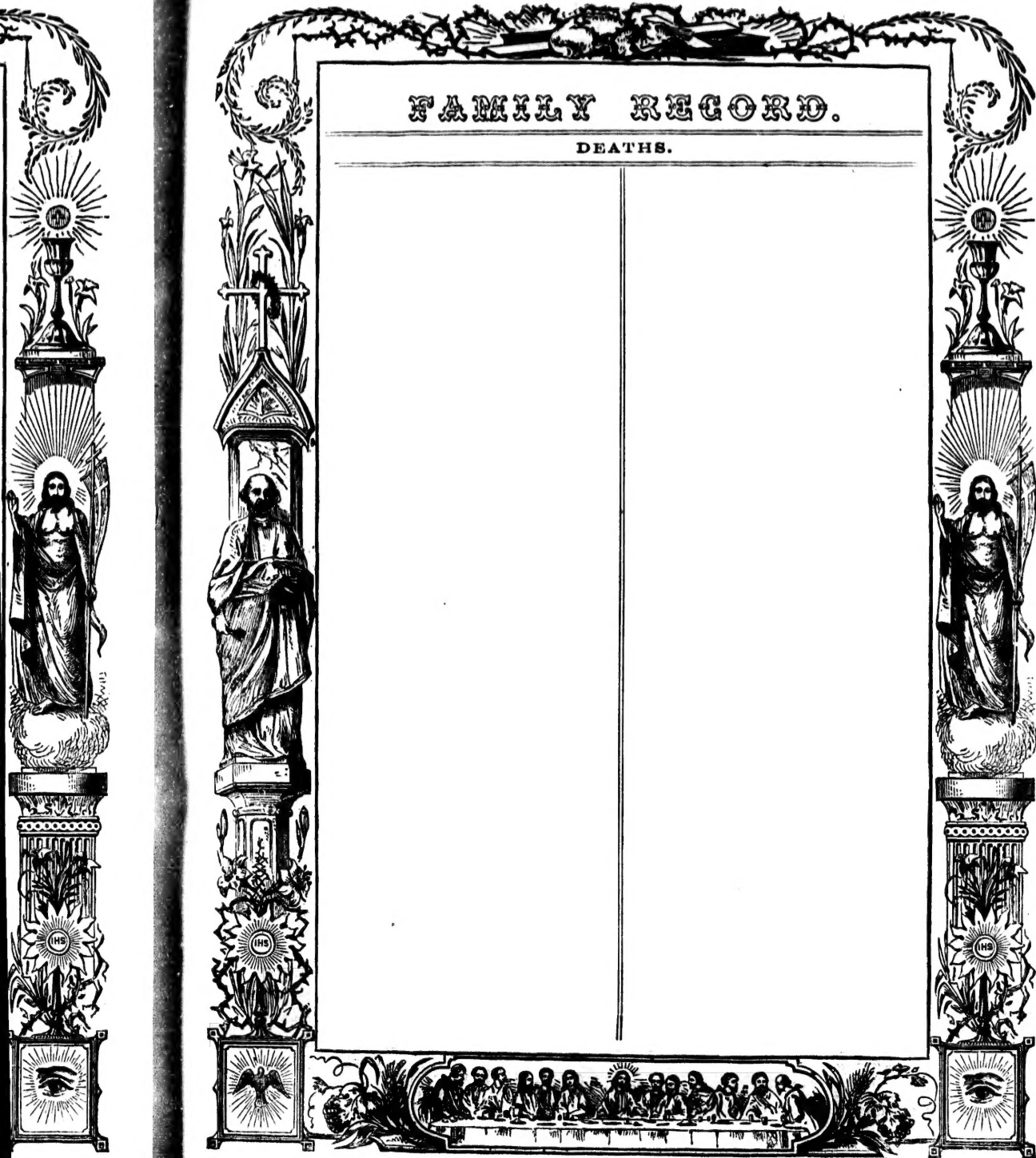


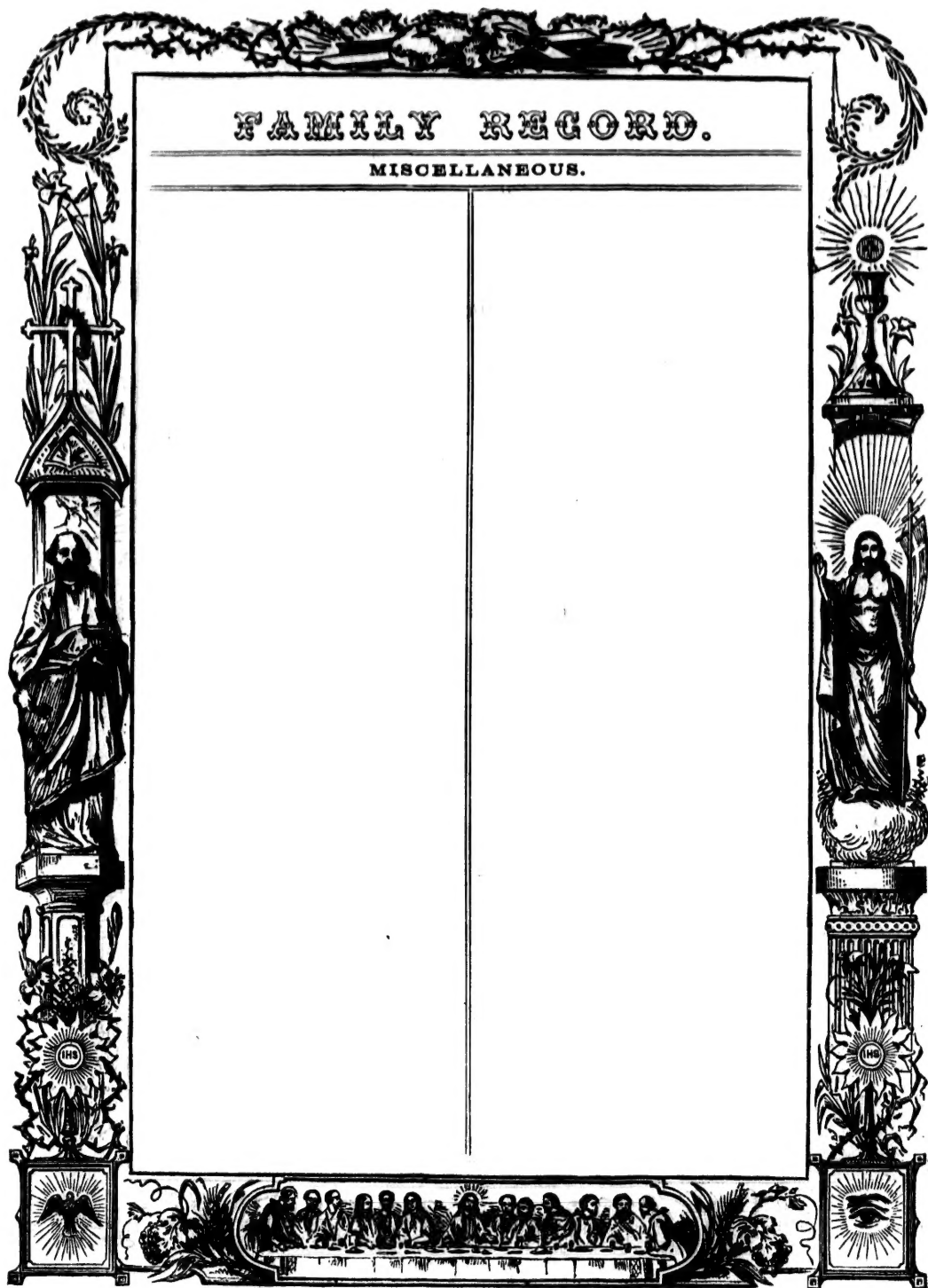




FAMILY RECORD.

DEATHS.







P R E F A C E.

THIS book, which the public has vouchsafed to receive favourably, is not an ambitious attempt to obtain celebrity; it is a work of patience and of faith, a flower laid on the altar of Mary, with the simple sincerity of a pilgrim of the good old time. The Blessed Virgin was, doubtless, deserving of a better historian, but she could find none more desirous of glorifying her name and propagating the devotion which is her due.

The life of the Queen of Angels, of the mystical rose of the new law, is, of itself, a theme so poetical that it naturally called forth all graceful and touching ideas, as well as the noblest expressions of our language. It is an Eastern Tale, reflecting the customs, the pageants, and the scenery of Asia; is it, therefore, surprising that the style should be tinted with an Oriental colouring?

We have studied the Fathers enough to know that they did not disdain the graces of diction, and that, in this respect, they fought paganism with equal arms. This is what the great St. Jerome called, in his figurative language, *cutting off the head of Goliath with his own sword*. What can be more elevated, more poetical, than certain descriptions of St. John Chrysostom? That sacred orator often chimes in with the Oriental poets, and it is in one of his homilies that we find the similitude of *the earth embalmed with the perfume of roses*, which has since been reproduced by Saadi in his Gulistan.

The letters and the homilies of St. Basil the Great, replete with agreeable pictures, imitated but not surpassed by Fenelon, have all a poetical cast very fit to frighten those timorous minds who, now-a-days, take poetry for a spectre, and would fain exclude it from all manner of works. It is the same with St. Gregory of Nazianzen, that sublime Christian dreamer, who questioned himself on the nature of his soul, *under the shade of thick foliage, whilst the zephyr, mingled with the songs of the birds, shed from the topmost branches of the trees a sweet and dreamy tranquillity; whilst the grasshoppers, hidden beneath the herbage, made all the woods resound, and a limpid stream flowed past his feet, winding on in its refreshing course through the wood*. If that be not poetry, I know not what it is.



In order to convert the nations it is necessary, first of all, to obtain a hearing; to confirm in the Roman faith masses long agitated by the successive shocks of revolutions, beaten by the wind of systems, indifferent from weariness, and open to the attacks of an audacious sect which raises its head higher than ever, for

Déjà de sa faveur on adore le bruit;

the first thing to be done is to induce them to read our works. The preacher who would divest the sacred Word of all the ornaments of elocution would soon have our churches deserted, and might say, like the Greek musician left alone in a public place, "Ye temples, hear me!" The religious writer who would affect a dull and arid style, in the midst of a nation which prides itself on its taste and literary skill, would assuredly fare no better; he would fall, with all his weight, into that oblivion where nothing floats, and his book, had it the intrinsic value of gold and pearls, would be, nevertheless, the most useless thing in the world, for none would touch it. St. Basil was so persuaded of this truth that he strenuously urged the young orators of his time to a profound study of human letters, so as to transfer their beauties into the Catholic works. "Human letters," says that great doctor, "are like leaves which serve to cover and to ornament the words of truth and wisdom. If Moses and Daniel were the two most brilliant lights of the Synagogue, it was because they had acquired all the arts of the Egyptians." St. Jerome subjected to the anti-literary attacks of the priest Rufinus, who accused him of mingling the filth of paganism with the word of the Lord, coolly sent him word that *being himself blind as a mole he ought not to mock those who had the eyes of a goat*. And, in fact, when the sumptuous decoration of altars and of tabernacles was regarded, even in the most austere ages of the Church, as a good and commendable practice, proper to heighten the majesty of Christian worship, wherefore should we make of religious literature a barren and dreary waste, whereon none would wish to enter for fear of sinking on the way under a load of weariness? Is it thus, then, that the Holy Scriptures, which St. John Chrysostom declared full of *pearls and diamonds*, were conceived? Are not all kinds of composition found in the Bible, from the eclogue to the epopœia? The saints of those remote times, which we, in our courtesy, are wont to call *barbarous*, were far from wishing to despoil religious works of all literary value. "What!" says an illustrious writer of the ninth century, "we wrap up the ashes of the saints in gold and precious stones, yet their actions are clothed but in rude and homely language! We adorn our love-stories with all the graces of fiction, and we describe in the driest, the dullest, and the most uninteresting manner, the immortal deeds of the heroes of Christianity! Is it, therefore, that elegance of style is only to be used for glossing over the turpitude of iniquity?"

"Would," says a pious and learned author who, in 1722, dedicated the life of a holy personage to the Bishop of Blois, "would that Catholics would give to the admirable achievements of the saints those ornaments wherewith sinners embellish their guilty passions, and thereby show that they know better how to adorn virtue than those worldlings to adorn vice."

If it be ever permitted to throw poetical flowers on a religious theme, it is, assuredly, when treating of the Mystical Rose of the new law; this is so true that the gravest doctors of other ages became poets without their knowing or wishing it, when they spoke of that glorious creature. St. Gregory of Neocesarea, that cold, austere thaumaturges, finds the most charming appellations for the Mother of God, whom he styles *source of light and immaculate flower of life*. St. Ephraim, that melancholy and enthusiastic solitary, compares the Blessed Virgin to the *golden censer exhaling the sweetest perfumes*. St. Epiphanius calls the Virgin a *spiritual ocean containing the celestial pearl*. St. Cyril of Alexandria, the *inextinguishable lamp which has brought forth the Sun of Justice*. "With what marvellous flowers of eloquence shall we weave thee a crown, O Mary!" says St. Basil of Selemia; "*from thee has budded the flower of Jesse, which embellishes us with glory and honour.*" St. Gregory the Great compares Mary, that virgin fair and adorned with the glory of her fruitfulness, to a very high mountain which soars above the angelic choirs and reaches even to the throne of the Divinity. Alcuin, that light of the court of Charlemagne, accustomed as he was to dry and arid labours, became a poet for Mary: "*Thou art my beloved,*" said he, "*thou art my joy and glory, O Virgin! thou art the life of heaven, the flower of the fields, the lily of the world.*" Pope Innocent III. compares Mary to the dawn. St. Thomas of Aquinas to the star of the ocean which guides and directs those who navigate the waters. "Hail! noble daughter of Kings," cries the learned and mystical Erasmus, "*thou art more brilliant than the dawn, milder than the silvery moon, purer than the fresh-blown lily, whiter than the mountain-snow, more graceful than the rose, more precious than the ruby, more chaste than the angels*"

Impressed with these counsels, encouraged by these examples, we have lightly rubbed with the honey of Engaddi the edge of the cup which we present to the people of the world—those spoiled children who reject with scorn all drinks which have not, like the sherbets of the East, the perfume of the violet and the rose. Some have, on this account, accused us of a crime, and bitterly reproached us with having sacrificed to the false gods; but when they set about giving quotations the result was rather unfortunate for them, for they have, without knowing it, found fault with Scriptural idioms and phraseology, that is to say, even the Word of God itself. "I do not always quote my authority," says Montaigne, "because nothing is more amusing than to see a thrust made through me at Virgil, Tacitus, Horace, in

a word, at the greatest writers of antiquity, by some who are scarcely able to read them." Precisely the same thing has happened to us, although we had not intended to lay such a snare for the simplicity of certain censors, who are, alas! in the highest degree, ignorant of their own ignorance, which is the worst ignorance of all, if the Orientals are to be believed. We have heard the Prophets gravely descanted on by small critics, who are reputed to know the whole Bible by heart. What could we do in such a case as that?

All evil passions are up in arms against this book, and men who ought to have sustained it, were it only for the sacred cause which it espouses, have stealthily pursued it with a malignity truly Pharisaical. May God, who lifts the seven-fold veil of malice from false hearts to penetrate to the actuating motives of their works—may he forgive them, even as we do! We have had such fair and honourable suffrages to console us, that we may well afford to overlook these puny attempts.

The foreign press, namely, the Italian, the German, and the Spanish, have taken much notice of this *Life of the Blessed Virgin*. Being unable to quote all, we shall confine ourselves to this extract from a learned article in *La Cruz*, (*The Cross*), a Spanish journal, religious, political, and literary, which is honoured with the patronage of the eminently Catholic clergy of Spain:—

"The Abbé Orsini, in tracing the annals of the worship of the Blessed Virgin, which commenced with Christianity, and in raking up authorities, which, but for him, might perchance have remained in oblivion, presents to the reader the titles whereon hyperdulia and the worship of the Virgin are founded, a worship which certainly occupies a golden page in the calendar of the world, and is connected with the most glorious associations. Nor is this all that the Abbé Orsini has done; his book comprises the biography of Jesus, and, in some measure, the history of the terrestrial globe, which dates from the fall of man, and the promise of a Redeemer. In this work we find profound theology, vast erudition, good literary taste, and enchanting touches of poetry

"The translator, Dr. F. Y. P., has added another jewel, in the name of the Spaniards, to the crown wherewith the *littérati* of Europe have adorned the brow of the author of *The Complete Life of the Mother of God*. This book is one of the great works of the nineteenth century, and merits a place in the first rank."

We refer not to these eulogiums, (which are certainly somewhat exaggerated,) through a ridiculous vanity or self-laudation, but to demonstrate that the *Life of the Mother of God* has been well received by Catholics abroad, whose sympathy is exceedingly precious to us. It is no less consoling to see that it is also becoming popular in Germany, in England, in Russia, and in America, where it has probably assisted in dispelling some unjust prejudices amongst dissenting Christians.

As for the French press, it has treated this book just as it pleased, for we have never attempted to influence it either by intrigue or solicitation of any sort, notwithstanding which it has, in general, expressed itself in such a way that we have only to return our best thanks. By a providential chance it



has happened, that the most of those literary men who have taken cognizance of our work were men of feeling, knowledge, and intellect, and have acted generously by us. But great minds are usually indulgent and lenient towards others; lions, conscious of their own strength, often magnanimously spare the weaker prey; it is not so with the vipers ^{which} hiss and bite in the mire of their native marsh, by way of satisfying their conscience.

Happy the author who falls into the hands of men able to appreciate a book, to examine it without prejudice, and with the probity which becomes the magistracy of thought. Criticism is a trade in which many meddle, but which very few understand; to do it as it should be done, there is need of learning, taste, and conscience, things which every one has not.

A learned prelate, whose name was still unknown to us when we wrote the preface to our first edition, the late Bishop Cotteret of Beauvais, a profound theologian and a very distinguished writer, after having justified our use of Oriental traditions—"Traditions," says the learned Bishop, "*which the author has not given as articles of faith*"—goes on to say: "The Abbé Orsini is one of the writers of our time who has the most perfectly mastered the language; he speaks like a true disciple of Chateaubriand." This was conferring a high honour upon us, although it was far from being deserved; we have never had the presumption to follow, even afar off, in the gigantic steps of that great master, and if our style have any, even a slight resemblance to his, we can only say, as did an humble poet of Kurdistan, on a similar occasion, "I have come forth, like Antar, that famous poet, from the garden of Nischabur; but Antar was the rose of the garden, and I am only a briar."

An observation has been made to us, to which we are now about to reply, it relates to the use which we have made of the Hebrew customs in completing our Life of the Blessed Virgin. Any traveller who has visited the East, or any scholar who is at all acquainted with the history and condition of Asia, will perceive that our work is based on long and laborious researches, and *not by any means on imagination*; we have not even presumed to invent the common forms of *farewell* or of *wishing a good journey*; all has been derived from respectable sources, which we have scrupulously acknowledged whenever the thing was worth the trouble. Our work has been read, moreover, by learned Orientalists, who have found it correct, and Israelites of the highest rank have praised the exact fidelity wherewith we have restored the faded splendour of Sion and the ancient customs of their fathers. The historian, like the painter, now requires a profound study of the local colouring. If an artist should attempt to introduce our Western customs and our Northern landscapes in a painting, of which the subject was taken from ancient Asia, he would by no means escape the just censure of the

connoisseurs: a literary work is likewise a painting, which should reproduce the hues of the sky, the aspect of the country, the historical costumes, the habits and the customs of the groups represented in its pages. In writing the life of the descendant of the kings of Juda, we have studied the requirements of our theme; we have remembered that it would not do to engraft the manners of the Israelites on our own, or to wrap them up, as Strauss says, in a Western disguise, but to paint them such as they were when Mary lived: that was the only way to adhere to probability, when tracing a history of what occurred in Jewish society in the days of Herod. We meet, in every page of the Gospel, the manners and customs of the Jews, to which Jesus Christ himself vouchsafed to conform; it can scarcely be doubted but that the Virgin had anticipated the example of her divine Son. The Hebrew customs were based upon Scripture and tradition, which made them sacred things in the eyes of the whole nation; to deviate from received usages would have been regarded as a grave misdemeanour. There was not even the nuptial garments of the bride that was not directed by the reminiscences of the Bible and the antediluvian traditions of the temple.

We have received, from quarters not connected with the press, testimonies of sympathy and good-will, which have descended upon us, from on high, like the gifts of Providence. The Prince Orsini, who has deigned to accept the dedication of our book, like a true Roman prince, and a friend of letters, has done us the honour to write to us:—

"A work so remarkable and so holy as yours certainly deserved a more distinguished patron than I am; I am penetrated with the liveliest gratitude, and no words of mine could convey to you my sense of the obligation you have conferred upon me. Rome applauds your work; and the glory which you have given to the Mother of God already reflects on yourself."

If we quote these flattering words, so characteristic of the graceful urbanity of the higher Italian nobility, it is not that we deem ourselves worthy of them; we receive them as a generous encouragement to do better at another time, and we lay them respectfully at the feet of the Blessed Virgin, well knowing that such kind and honourable suffrage from a prince as eminent for his piety as for his intelligence, proceeds from her and to her belongs.

Another compliment, very precious to our heart, is from the Commander Mouttinho-Lima, Minister-Plenipotentiary from the Emperor of Brazil, who, with diplomatic talents of the highest order, has a refined and enlightened taste for letters, which he has himself cultivated with much success.

"Your new edition of the Life of the Blessed Virgin, only a few months after its first appearance," writes his Excellency, "is sufficiently indicative of the favour wherewith the book has been received by the public. Permit me, on the occasion of this second edition, to add my humble testimony to those which you may have already received."

"Your work has contributed, and doubtless will yet contribute more and more, to promote in France the touching devotion to the Virgin, where of old it was so fervently propagated by St.

Bernard. I am persuaded that wherever the children of the Church are found, the Life of the Mother of God will produce the same effect; be my name the pledge."

But it is not only amongst the great ones of the earth that our Life of the Blessed Virgin has found favour; many learned doctors, both Italian and Spanish, have also honoured it with their approbation. His Lordship the Bishop of Salamanca, a learned prelate, well worthy of presiding over that famous university which has, for many ages, shed a brilliant light on Europe, has deigned to protect it in Spain. His Eminence the Archbishop of Malines, whose fame has spread far beyond the boundaries of his own country, has given his formal approbation to the Belgian editions. Finally, our own bishop has, from the first, taken it under his protection, as became a man who has no need of the opinion of others to form his own, and who waits not to see how the current of public opinion will go.

We shall here insert a portion of the letter of Monsgr. Castanelli d'Istria, to the end that if this book should have any protracted existence, it will prove, in days to come, that at a time when religious literature had no sort of encouragement in France, it was protected and fostered by Roman princes, ambassadors from remote regions, and by saintly and learned prelates.

"It is somewhat late to thank you for the present of your valuable work, and for the pleasure it gave me to read a life doubly interesting, from the nature of the subject and the charming style wherewith you have embellished it. I prize this gift the more highly as coming from the author, and because that author is a countryman and one of my own priests. Nor am I alone in my appreciation of the merits of your book. The opinion of all those readers to whom I have lent it is quite in accordance with that of the journals of Paris.

"I am gratified to see that the first fruits of your literary labours are dedicated to the Queen of Angels. From such a commencement there is reason to hope for a career the most distinguished."

Since these encouraging letters were addressed to us, the Life of the Mother of God has had (we may venture to say it, because the proof is apparent) the most unbounded success, not only in France, but throughout Europe, and even beyond its bounds. Three translations of it have been made in Italy; it has been translated in Spain by two Spanish doctors; in Germany by an able ecclesiastic, and there has been published at Leipsic a second translation, magnificently illustrated; several editions have been published in Belgium; it has even penetrated the depth of Russia, and has crossed the ocean to Mexico; finally, it has been favourably received at Rome, where it is propagated by permission of the Sacred College. Thanks to the powerful protection of Mary, the little grain of mustard-seed has become a great tree, whose branches overspread the earth; trifling as this book may be, She has blessed it, because She knows it was written with no other intention than that of promoting her glory.

Deeply grateful to that European public which has received our work so

favourably, we have done our best to merit that sympathy which we prize so highly. This new edition, printed with the permission of His Grace the Archbishop of Paris, has been carefully revised and considerably enlarged; as it is for the last time, we have endeavoured to do our duty conscientiously. The second part, which comprises the History of the Devotion to Mary, has been entirely remodelled, and enriched with important facts taken from the rarest and most authentic sources. Notwithstanding all our efforts, we cannot but be aware that our work is still very imperfect. But such is the ordinary lot of human undertaking. Perfection is the mountain of the talisman, whose summit no mortal has ever reached, and the present writer least of all.

Letters Apostolic

OF

OUR MOST HOLY LORD PIUS IX.,

BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE POPE,

CONCERNING THE DOGMATIC DEFINITION OF THE IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION OF THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF GOD.

[TRANSLATION.]

*Pius, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God: for the perpetual
remembrance of the thing.*

THE Ineffable God, whose ways are mercy and truth, whose will is omnipotence, and whose wisdom reaches powerfully from end to end, and disposes all things sweetly, when he foresaw from all eternity the most sorrowful ruin of the entire human race to follow from the transgression of Adam, and in a mystery hidden from ages determined to complete, through the incarnation of the Word, in a more hidden sacrament the first work of His goodness, so that man, led into sin by the craft of diabolical iniquity, should not perish contrary to his merciful design, and that what was about to befall in the first Adam should be restored more happily in the second; from the beginning and before ages, chose and ordained a mother for His only-begotten Son, of whom, made flesh, He should be born in the blessed plenitude of time, and followed her with so great love before all creatures that in her alone He pleased Himself with a most benign complacency. Wherefore, far before all the angelic spirits and all the Saints, He so wonderfully endowed her with the abun-

dance of all heavenly gifts, drawn from the treasure of divinity, that she might be ever free from every stain of sin, and, all fair and perfect, would bear before her that plenitude of innocence and holiness than which, under God, none greater is understood, and which, except God, no one can reach, even in thought. And, indeed, it was most becoming that she should shine always adorned with the splendor of the most perfect holiness, and, free even from the stain of original sin, she should have the most complete triumph over the ancient serpent—that Mother so venerable, to whom God the Father willed to give his only Son, begotten of His heart, equal to Himself, and whom He loves as Himself; and to give Him in such a manner that He is by nature one and the same common Son of God the Father and of the Virgin, and whom the Son chose substantially to be His Mother, and of whom the Holy Ghost willed that, by His operation, He, from whom He Himself proceeds, should be conceived and born.

Which original innocence of the august Virgin agreeing completely with her admirable holiness, and with the most excellent dignity of the Mother of God, the Catholic Church, which, ever taught by the Holy Spirit, is the pillar and ground of truth, as possessing a doctrine divinely received, and comprehended in the deposit of heavenly revelation, has never ceased to lay down, to cherish, and to illustrate continually by numerous proofs, and daily more and more by conspicuous facts. For this doctrine, flourishing from the most ancient times, and implanted in the minds of the faithful, and by the care and zeal of the Holy Pontiffs wonderfully propagated, the Church herself has most clearly pointed out when she did not hesitate to propose the conception of the same Virgin for the public devotion and veneration of the faithful. By which illustrious act she pointed out the conception of the Virgin as singular, wonderful, and very different from the origin of the rest of mankind, and to be venerated as entirely holy, since the Church celebrates by festivals only that which is holy. And, therefore, the very words in which the Sacred Scriptures speak of uncreated Wisdom and represent His eternal origin, she has been accustomed to use not only in the offices of the Church, but also in the holy liturgy, and to transfer to the origin of that Virgin, which was pre-ordained by

one and the same decree with the incarnation of Divine Wisdom.

But though all those things everywhere justly received amongst the faithful show with what zeal the Roman Church, the mother and mistress of all churches, has supported the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, yet the illustrious acts of this Church are evidently worthy that they should be reviewed in detail; since so great is the dignity and authority of the same Church, so much is due to her who is the centre of Catholic truth and unity, in whom alone religion has been inviolably guarded, and from whom it is right that all the Churches should receive the tradition of faith.

Thus the same Roman Church had nothing more at heart than to assert, to protect, to promote, and to vindicate in the most eloquent manner the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, its devotion and doctrine, which fact is attested and proclaimed by so many illustrious acts of the Roman Pontiffs, Our predecessors, to whom, in the person of the Prince of the Apostles, was divinely committed by Christ Our Lord the supreme care and power of feeding lambs and sheep, of confirming the brethren, and of ruling and governing the Universal Church.

Indeed, Our predecessors have ever gloried in instituting in the Roman Church by their own Apostolic authority the Feast of the Conception, and to augment, ennoble, and promote with all their power the devotion thus instituted, by a proper Office and a proper Mass, by which the prerogative of immunity from hereditary stain was most manifestly asserted; to increase it either by indulgences granted, or by leave given to states, provinces, and kingdoms, that they might choose as their patron the Mother of God, under the title of the Immaculate Conception; or by approved sodalities, congregations, and religious families instituted to the honor of the Immaculate Conception; or by praises given to the piety of those who have erected monasteries, hospitals, or churches, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, or who have bound themselves by a religious vow to defend strenuously the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God. Above all, they were happy to ordain that the Feast of the Conception should be celebrated through the whole Church as that of the Nativity; and, in fine, that it should be celebrated with an Octave in the Universal Church as it was placed in



the rank of the festivals which are commanded to be kept holy; also, that a Pontifical service in our Patriarchal Liberian Basilica should be performed yearly on the day sacred to the Conception of the Virgin; and desiring to cherish daily more and more in the minds of the Faithful this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, and to excite their piety in worshipping and venerating the Virgin conceived without original sin, they have rejoiced most freely to give leave that in the Litany of Loretto, and in the Preface of the Mass itself, the Immaculate Conception of the same Virgin should be proclaimed, and that thus the law of faith should be established by the very law of supplication. We ourselves, treading in the footsteps of so many predecessors, have not only received and approved what had been most wisely and piously established and appointed by them, but also mindful of the institution of Sixtus IV., We have appointed by Our authority a proper Office for the Immaculate Conception, and with a most joyful mind have granted the use of it to the Universal Church.

But since those things which pertain to worship are evidently bound by an intimate chord to its object, and cannot remain fixed and determined, if it be doubtful, and placed in uncertainty, therefore our predecessors, the Roman Pontiffs, increasing with all their care the devotion of the Conception, studied most especially to declare and inculcate its object and doctrine; for they taught clearly and openly that the festival was celebrated for the Conception of the Virgin, and they proscribed as false and most foreign to the intention of the Church the opinion of those who considered and affirmed that it was not the Conception itself, but the sanctification, to which devotion was paid by the Church. Nor did they think of treating more indulgently those who, in order to weaken the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, drawing a distinction between the first and second instant and moment of the Conception, asserted that the Conception was indeed celebrated, but not for the first instant and moment; for Our predecessors themselves thought it their duty to protect and defend with all zeal both the feast of the Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin, and the Conception from the first instant as the true object of devotion. Hence the words, evidently decretive, in which Alexander VII. declared the true in-

tention of the Church, saying: "Certainly, it is the ancient piety of the faithful of Christ towards His Most Blessed Mother the Virgin Mary, believing that her soul, in the first instant of creation, and of infusion into the body, was by a special grace and privilege of God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ her Son the Redeemer of mankind, preserved free from the stain of original sin, and in this sense they keep and celebrate with solemn rites the Festival of her Conception."

And to the same, Our predecessors, this also was most especially a duty to preserve from contention the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, guarded and protected with all care and zeal. For not only have they never suffered that this doctrine should ever be censured or traduced in any way, or by any one, but they have gone much farther, and in clear declarations on repeated occasions they have proclaimed that the doctrine in which we confess the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin is, and by its own merit, held evidently consistent with Ecclesiastical worship, that it is ancient and nearly universal, and of the same sort as that which the Roman Church has undertaken to cherish and protect, and, above all, worthy to be placed in its sacred liturgy and its solemn prayers. Nor content with this, in order that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin should remain inviolate, they have most severely prohibited the opinion adverse to this doctrine to be defended either in public or in private, and they have wished to crush it, as it were, by repeated blows. To which reiterated and most clear declarations, lest they might appear empty, they added 'a sanction; all which things Our illustrious predecessor, Alexander VII., embraced in these words:--

"Considering that the Holy Roman Church solemnly celebrates the festival of the Conception of the Immaculate and Ever-Blessed Virgin, and has appointed for this a special and proper office according to the pious, devout, and laudable institution which emanated from Our predecessor, Sixtus IV., and wishing, after the example of the Roman Pontiffs, Our predecessors, to favor this laudable piety, devotion, and festival, and the reverence shown towards it, never changed in the Roman Church since the institution of the worship itself; also in order to protect the piety and devotion of venerating



and celebrating the Most Blessed Virgin, preserved from original sin by the preventing grace of the Holy Ghost, and desiring to preserve in the flock of Christ unity of spirit in the bond of peace, removing offences, and brawls, and scandals; at the instance and prayers of the said Bishops, with the Chapters of their churches, and of King Philip and his kingdoms,—we renew the constitutions and decrees issued by the Roman Pontiffs, Our predecessors, and especially by Sixtus IV., Paul V., and Gregory XV., in favor of asserting the opinion that the soul of the Blessed Virgin, in its creation and infusion into the body, was endowed with the grace of the Holy Ghost, and preserved from original sin; likewise, also, in favor of the festival of the same Virgin Mother of God, celebrated according to that pious belief which is recited above, and We command that it shall be observed under the censures and punishments contained in the same constitutions.

“And against all and each of those who try to interpret the aforesaid constitutions or decrees so that they may frustrate the favor shown through these to the said belief and to the festival or worship celebrated according to it, or who try to recall into dispute the same belief, festival, or worship, or against these in any manner, either directly or indirectly, and on any pretext, even that of examining the grounds of defining it, or of explaining or interpreting the Sacred Scriptures or the Holy Fathers or Doctors; in fine, who should dare under any pretext or on any occasion whatsoever, to say either in writing or in speech, to preach, to treat, to dispute, by determining or asserting anything against these, or by bringing arguments against them and leaving these arguments unanswered, or by expressing dissent in any other possible manner; besides the punishments and censures contained in the constitutions of Sixtus IV., to which we desire to add, and by these presents do add, those: We will that they should be deprived *ipso facto*, and without other declaration, of the faculty of preaching, of reading in public, or of teaching and interpreting, and also of their voice, whether active or passive, in elections; from which censures they cannot be absolved, nor obtain dispensation, unless from Us, or Our successors, the Roman Pontiffs; likewise We wish to subject, and We hereby do subject, the same persons to other penalties to be inflicted at Our will,

and at that of the same Roman Pontiffs, Our successors, renewing the constitutions or decrees of Paul IV. and Gregory XV., above referred to.

"And We prohibit, under the penalties and censures contained in the Index of Prohibited Books, and We will and declare that they should be esteemed prohibited *ipso facto*, and without other declaration, books in which the aforesaid belief and the festival or devotion celebrated according to it is recanted into dispute, or in which anything whatever is written or read against these, or lectures, sermons, treatises, and disputations against the same, published after the decree of Paul V. above mentioned, or to be published at any future time."

All are aware with how much zeal this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God has been handed down, asserted and propagated by the most distinguished religious Orders, the most celebrated theological academies, and the most eminent doctors of the science of Divinity. All know likewise how anxious have been the Bishops openly and publicly to profess, even in the Ecclesiastical assemblies themselves, that the Most Holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, by virtue of the merits of Christ Our Lord, the Saviour of mankind, never lay under original sin, but was preserved free from the original stain, and thus was redeemed in a more sublime manner. To which, lastly, is added this fact, most grave, and, in an especial manner, most important of all, that the Council of Trent itself, when it promulgated the dogmatic decree concerning original sin, in which, according to the testimonies of the Sacred Scriptures, of the Holy Fathers, and of the most approved councils, it determined and defined that all mankind are born under original sin; solemnly declared, however, that it was not its intention to include in the decree itself, and in the amplitude of its definition, the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Indeed, by this declaration, the Tridentine Fathers have asserted, according to the times and the circumstances of affairs, that the Blessed Virgin Mary was free from the original stain, and thus clearly signified that nothing could be justly adduced from the sacred writings, nor from the authority of the Fathers, which would in any way gainsay so great a prerogative of the Virgin.



And, in real truth, illustrious monuments of a venerated antiquity of the Eastern and of the Western Church most powerfully testify that this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin, every day more and more so splendidly explained and confirmed by the highest authority, teaching, zeal, science, and wisdom of the Church, and so wonderfully propagated amongst all the nations and peoples of the Catholic world, always existed in the Church as received by Our ancestors, and stamped with the character of a divine revelation. For the Church of Christ, careful guardian and defender of the dogmas deposited with her, changes nothing in them, diminishes nothing, adds nothing, but, with all industry, by faithfully and wisely treating ancient things, if they are handed down from antiquity, so studies to eliminate, to clear them up, that these ancient dogmas of heavenly faith may receive evidence, light, distinction, but still may retain their fulness, integrity, propriety, and may increase only in their own kind—that is, in the same dogma, the same sense, and the same belief.

The Fathers and writers of the Church, taught by the heavenly writings, had nothing more at heart, in the books written to explain the Scriptures, to vindicate the dogmas, and to instruct the faithful, than emulously to declare and exhibit in many and wonderful ways the Virgin's most high sanctity, dignity, and freedom from all stain of original sin, and her renowned victory over the most foul enemy of the human race. Wherefore, repeating the words in which, at the beginning of the world, the Almighty, announcing the remedies of his mercy, prepared for regenerating mankind, crushed the audacity of the lying Serpent, and wonderfully raised up the hope of our race, saying, "I will place enmity between thee and the woman, thy seed and hers," they taught that in this divine oracle was clearly and openly pointed out the merciful Redeemer of the human race—the only-begotten Son of God, Christ Jesus, and that his Most Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, was designated, and at the same time that the enmity of both against the Serpent was signally expressed. Wherefore, as Christ, the mediator of God and men, having assumed human nature, blotting out the handwriting of the decree which stood against us, fastened it triumphantly to the Cross, so the Most Holy Virgin, bound by a most close and in



dissoluble chain with Him, exercising with Him and through Him eternal enmity against the malignant Serpent, and triumphing most amply over the same, has crushed his head with her Immaculate foot.

This illustrious and singular triumph of the Virgin, and her most exalted innocence, purity, and holiness, her freedom from all stain of sin, and ineffable abundance and greatness of all heavenly graces, virtues, and privileges, the same Fathers beheld in that ark of Noah, which, divinely appointed, escaped safe and sound from the common shipwreck of the whole world; also in that ladder which Jacob beheld reaching from earth to heaven, by whose steps the Angels of God ascended and descended, on whose top leaned God himself; also in that bush which, in the holy place, Moses beheld blaze on every side, and amidst the crackling flames neither to be consumed nor to suffer the least injury, but to grow green and to blossom fairly; also in that impregnable tower in front of the enemy, on which are hung a thousand bucklers and all the armor of the brave; also in that garden fenced round about, which cannot be violated nor corrupted by any schemes of fraud; also in that brilliant city of God, whose foundations are in the holy mounts; also in that most august temple of God, which, shining with divine splendor, is filled with the glory of God; likewise in many other things of this kind which the Fathers have handed down, that the exalted dignity of the Mother of God, and her spotless innocence, and her holiness, obnoxious to no blemish, have been signally pre-announced.

To describe the same totality, as it were, of divine gifts, and the original integrity of the Virgin of whom Jesus was born, the same Fathers, using the eloquence of the Prophets, celebrate the august Virgin as the spotless dove, the holy Jerusalem, the exalted throne of God, the ark and house of sanctification, which Eternal Wisdom built for itself; and as that Queen who, abounding in delights and leaning on her beloved, came forth entirely perfect from the mouth of the Most High, fair and most dear to God, and never stained with the least spot. But when the same Fathers and the writers of the Church revolved in their hearts and minds that the Most Blessed Virgin, in the name and by the order of God himself, was proclaimed full of grace by the Angel Gabriel, when announcing her most sub-

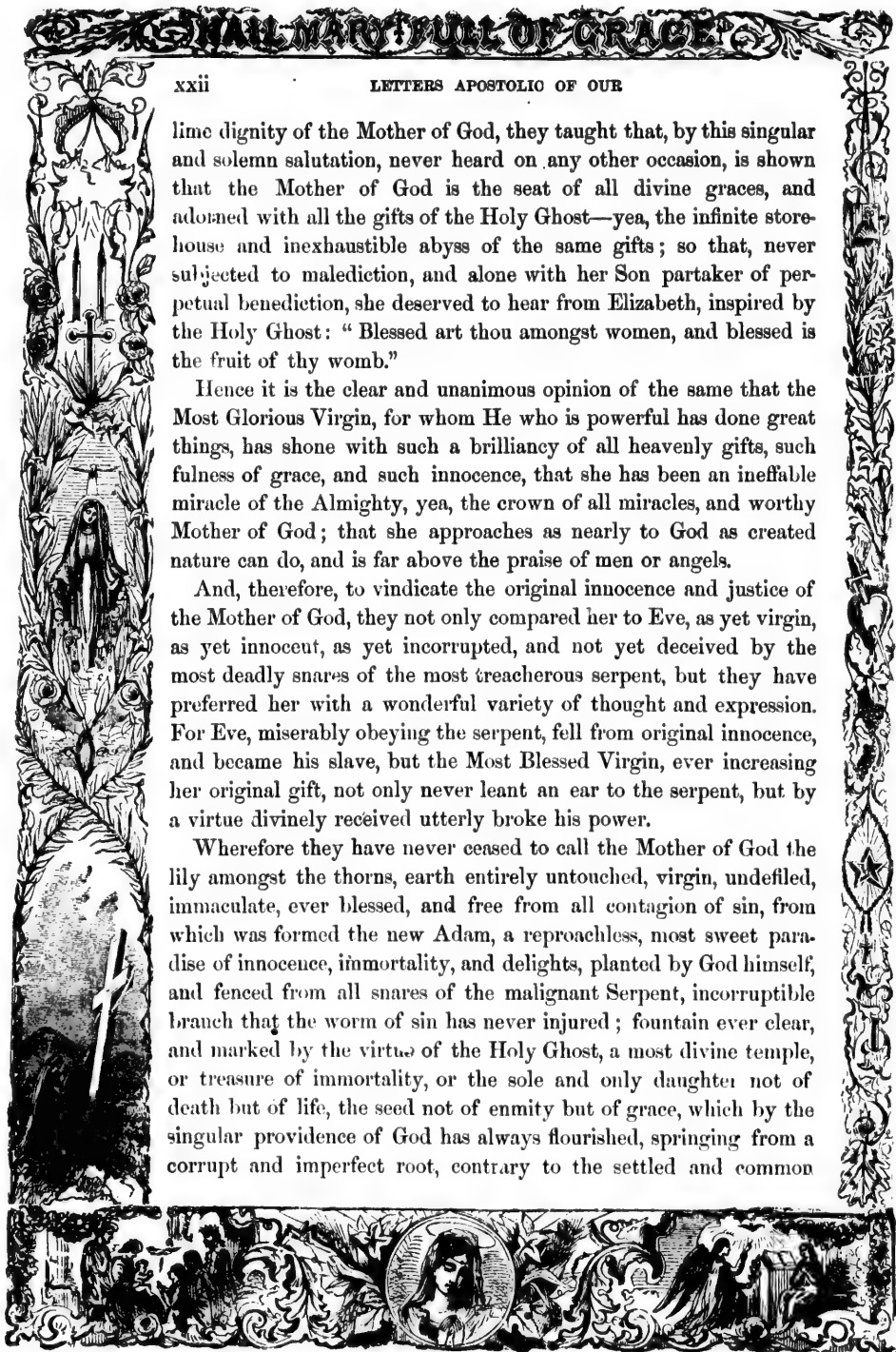


lime dignity of the Mother of God, they taught that, by this singular and solemn salutation, never heard on any other occasion, is shown that the Mother of God is the seat of all divine graces, and adorned with all the gifts of the Holy Ghost—yea, the infinite storehouse and inexhaustible abyss of the same gifts; so that, never subjected to malediction, and alone with her Son partaker of perpetual benediction, she deserved to hear from Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Ghost: "Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."

Hence it is the clear and unanimous opinion of the same that the Most Glorious Virgin, for whom He who is powerful has done great things, has shone with such a brilliancy of all heavenly gifts, such fulness of grace, and such innocence, that she has been an ineffable miracle of the Almighty, yea, the crown of all miracles, and worthy Mother of God; that she approaches as nearly to God as created nature can do, and is far above the praise of men or angels.

And, therefore, to vindicate the original innocence and justice of the Mother of God, they not only compared her to Eve, as yet virgin, as yet innocent, as yet incorrupted, and not yet deceived by the most deadly snares of the most treacherous serpent, but they have preferred her with a wonderful variety of thought and expression. For Eve, miserably obeying the serpent, fell from original innocence, and became his slave, but the Most Blessed Virgin, ever increasing her original gift, not only never leant an ear to the serpent, but by a virtue divinely received utterly broke his power.

Wherefore they have never ceased to call the Mother of God the lily amongst the thorns, earth entirely untouched, virgin, undefiled, immaculate, ever blessed, and free from all contagion of sin, from which was formed the new Adam, a reproachless, most sweet paradise of innocence, immortality, and delights, planted by God himself, and fenced from all snares of the malignant Serpent, incorruptible branch that the worm of sin has never injured; fountain ever clear, and marked by the virtue of the Holy Ghost, a most divine temple, or treasure of immortality, or the sole and only daughter not of death but of life, the seed not of enmity but of grace, which by the singular providence of God has always flourished, springing from a corrupt and imperfect root, contrary to the settled and common



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laws. But if these encomiums, though most splendid, were not sufficient, they proclaimed in proper and defined opinions that when sin was to be treated of, no question should be entertained concerning the Holy Virgin Mary, to whom an abundance of grace was given to conquer sin completely. They also declared that the Most Glorious Virgin was the reparatrix of her parents, the vivifier of posterity, chosen from the ages, prepared for himself by the Most High, predicted by God when he said to the serpent, "I will place enmity between thee and the woman," who undoubtedly has crushed the poisonous head of the same serpent; and therefore they affirm that the same Blessed Virgin was through grace perfectly free from every stain of sin, and from all contagion of body and soul and mind, and always conversant with God, and united with him in an eternal covenant, never was in darkness, but always in light, and therefore was plainly a fit habitation for Christ, not on account of her bodily state, but on account of her original grace.

To these things are added the noble words in which, speaking of the Conception of the Virgin, they have testified that nature yielded to grace and stood trembling, not being able to proceed further; for it was to be that the Virgin Mother of God should not be conceived by Anna before grace should bear fruit. For she ought thus to be conceived as the first born, from whom should be conceived the first born of every creature. They have testified that the flesh of the Virgin, taken from Adam, did not admit the stains of Adam, and on this account that the Most Blessed Virgin was the tabernacle created by God himself, formed by the Holy Spirit, truly enriched with purple which that new Beseleel made, adorned and woven with gold; and that this same Virgin is, and deservedly is celebrated as she who was the first and the peculiar work of God, escaped from the fiery weapons of evil, and fair by nature, and entirely free from all stain, came into the world all shining like the morn in her Immaculate Conception; nor, truly, was it right that this vessel of election should be assailed by common injuries, since, differing very much from others, she had community with them only in their nature, not in their fault.

Moreover, it was right that, as the Only Begotten had a Father in heaven, whom the seraphim proclaim thrice holy, so he should



have a Mother on the earth, who should never want the splendor of holiness. And this doctrine indeed, so filled the minds and souls of our forefathers, that a marvellous and singular form of speech prevailed with them, in which they very frequently called the Mother of God immaculate and entirely immaculate, innocent and most innocent, spotless, holy, and most distant from every stain of sin, all pure, all perfect, the type and model of purity and innocence, more beautiful than beauty, more gracious than grace, more holy than holiness, and alone holy, and most pure in soul and body, who has surpassed all perfectitude and all virginity, and has become the dwelling-place of all the graces of the Most Holy Spirit, and who, God alone excepted, is superior to all, and by nature fairer, more beautiful, and more holy than the cherubim and seraphim; she whom all the tongues of heaven and earth do not suffice to extol. No one is ignorant that these forms of speech have passed, as it were, spontaneously into the monuments of the most holy liturgy, and the Offices of the Church, and that they occur often in them and abound amply; and that the Mother of God is invoked and named in them as a spotless dove of beauty, as a rose ever blooming and perfectly pure, and ever spotless and ever blessed, and is celebrated as innocence which was never wounded, and a second Eve who brought forth Emmanuel.

It is no wonder, then, if the Pastors of the Church and the faithful people have daily more and more gloried to profess with so much piety and fervor this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God, pointed out in the Sacred Scriptures, according to the judgment of the Fathers, handed down in so many mighty testimonies of the same, expressed and celebrated in so many illustrious monuments of a revered antiquity, and proposed, and with great piety confirmed, by the greatest and highest judgment of the Church; so that nothing would be more dear, more pleasing to the same, than everywhere to worship, venerate, invoke, and proclaim the Virgin Mother of God conceived without original stain. Wherefore, from the ancient times, the Princes of the Church, Ecclesiastics, and even emperors and kings themselves, have earnestly entreated of this Apostolic See that the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God should be defined as a dogma



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of Catholic faith. Which entreaties were renewed also in these Our times, and especially were addressed to Gregory XVI., Our predecessor of happy memory, and to Ourselves, not only by Bishops, but by the secular clergy, religious Orders, by the greatest princes, and by the faithful people.

Therefore, with singular joy of mind, well knowing all these things, and seriously considering them, scarcely had We, though unworthy, been raised by a mysterious dispensation of Divine Providence to the exalted Chair of Peter, and undertaken the government of the whole Church, than, following the veneration, the piety, and love We had entertained for the Blessed Virgin from Our tender years, We had nothing at heart more than to accomplish all these things which as yet were amongst the ardent wishes of the Church, that the honor of the Most Blessed Virgin should be increased, and her prerogatives should shine with a fuller light. But wishing to bring to this full maturity We appointed a special congregation of our venerable brothers, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, illustrious by their piety, their wisdom, and their knowledge of the sacred sciences, and We also selected Ecclesiastics, both secular and regular, well trained in theological discipline, that they should most carefully weigh all those things which relate to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, and report to Us their opinion. And, although from the entreaties lately received by Us for at length defining the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, the opinions of most of the Bishops of the Church were understood; however, We sent Encyclic Letters, dated at Gaeta, the 2d day of February, in the year 1849, to all our Venerable Brethren the Bishops of all the Catholic world, in order that having offered prayers to God they might signify to Us, in writing, what was the piety and devotion of their flocks towards the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, and especially what the Bishops themselves thought about promulgating the definition, or what they desired in order that We might pronounce Our supreme judgment as solemnly as possible.

Certainly we were filled with no slight consolation when the replies of our Venerable Brethren came to Us. For, with an incredible joyfulness, gladness, and zeal, they not only confirmed their own singular piety, and that of their clergy and faithful people, towards

the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin, but they even entreated of Us with a common voice that the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin should be defined by Our supreme judgment and authority. Nor, indeed, were We filled with less joy when our venerable brothers, the Cardinals of the Special Congregation aforesaid, and the consulting theologians chosen by Us, after a diligent examination demanded from Us with equal alacrity and zeal this definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God.

Afterwards walking in the illustrious footsteps of Our predecessors, and desiring to proceed duly and properly, We proclaimed and held a Consistory, in which We addressed Our Brethren, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, and with the greatest consolation of mind We heard them entreat of Us that We should promulgate the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mother of God.

Therefore having full trust in the Lord that the opportune time had come for defining the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary Mother of God, which the Divine words, venerable tradition, the perpetual opinion of the Church, the singular agreement of Catholic Prelates and Faithful, and the signal acts and constitutions of Our predecessors wonderfully illustrate and proclaim; having most diligently weighed all things, and poured forth to God assiduous and fervent prayers, We resolved that We would no longer delay to sanction and define, by Our supreme authority, the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, and thus to satisfy the most pious desires of the Catholic world and Our own piety towards the Most Holy Virgin, and, at the same time, to honor more and more the only-begotten Son Jesus Christ Our Lord, since whatever honor and praise is given to the Mother redounds to the Son.

Wherefore, after We had unceasingly, in humility and fasting, offered our own prayers and the public prayers of the Church to God the Father, through his Son, that He would deign to direct and confirm Our mind by the power of the Holy Ghost, and implored the aid of the entire heavenly host, and invoked the Paraclete with sighs, and He thus inspiring, to the honor of the Holy and undivided Trinity, to the glory and ornament of the Virgin Mother of God, to the exaltation of the Catholic faith and the increase of the Catholic



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religion, by the authority of Jesus Christ Our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles, Peter and Paul, We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God, and therefore should firmly and constantly be believed by all the faithful. Wherefore, if any shall dare—*which God forbid*—to think otherwise than as it has been defined by Us, they should know and understand that they are condemned by their own judgment, that they have suffered shipwreck of the faith, and have revolted from the unity of the Church; and besides, by their own act they subject themselves to the penalties justly established, if what they think they should dare to signify by word, writing, or any other outward means.

Our mouth is filled with joy, and Our tongue with exultation, and We return, and shall ever return, the most humble and the greatest thanks to Jesus Christ Our Lord, because through his singular beneficence He has granted to Us, though unworthy, to offer and decree this honor, glory, and praise, to His Most Holy Mother; but We rest in the most certain hope and confidence that this Most Blessed Virgin, who, all fair and immaculate, has bruised the poisonous head of the most malignant Serpent, and brought salvation to the world, who is the praise of the Prophets and the Apostles, the honor of the Martyrs, and the crown and joy of all the Saints—who is the safest refuge and most faithful helper of all who are in danger, and the most powerful mediatrix and conciliatrix with the only-begotten Son of the whole world, and the most illustrious glory and ornament, and most firm guardian of the Holy Church, who has destroyed all heresies, and snatched from the greatest calamities of all kinds the faithful peoples and nations, and delivered Us from so many threatening dangers, will effect by her most powerful patronage that, all difficulties being removed, and all errors dissipated, Our Holy Mother the Catholic Church may flourish daily more and more throughout all nations and countries, and may reign from sea to sea to the ends of the earth, and may enjoy all peace, tranquillity, and liberty; that the sinner may obtain pardon, the sick healing, the weak strength



of heart, the afflicted consolation, and that all who are in error, their spiritual blindness being dissipated, may return to the path of truth and justice, and may become one flock and one shepherd.

Let all the children of the Catholic Church most dear to Us hear these Our words and, with a more ardent zeal of piety, religion, and love, proceed to worship, invoke, and pray to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, conceived without original sin, and let them fly with entire confidence to this most sweet Mother of Mercy and Grace in all dangers, difficulties, doubts, and fears. For nothing is to be feared, and nothing is to be despaired of under her guidance, under her auspices, under her favor, under her protection, who, bearing towards us a maternal affection, and taking up the business of our salvation, is solicitous for the whole human race, and, appointed by God the Queen of Heaven and Earth, and exalted above all the choirs of Angels, and orders of Saints, standing at the right hand of the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord, intercedes most powerfully, and obtains what she asks, and cannot be frustrated.

Finally, in order that this Our definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary may be brought to the knowledge of the Universal Church, We will these Letters Apostolic to stand for a perpetual remembrance of the thing, commanding that to transcripts or printed copies, subscribed by the hand of some notary public, and authenticated by the seal of a person of Ecclesiastical rank, appointed for the purpose, the same faith shall be paid which would be paid to those presents if they were exhibited or shown.

Let no man interfere with this Our declaration, pronouncement, and definition, or oppose and contradict it with presumptuous rashness. If any should presume to assail it, let him know that he will incur the indignation of the Omnipotent God and of His blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, in the year of the Incarnation of Our Lord 1854, the sixth of the Ides of December, in the ninth year of Our Pontificate.

PIUS IX., POPE.

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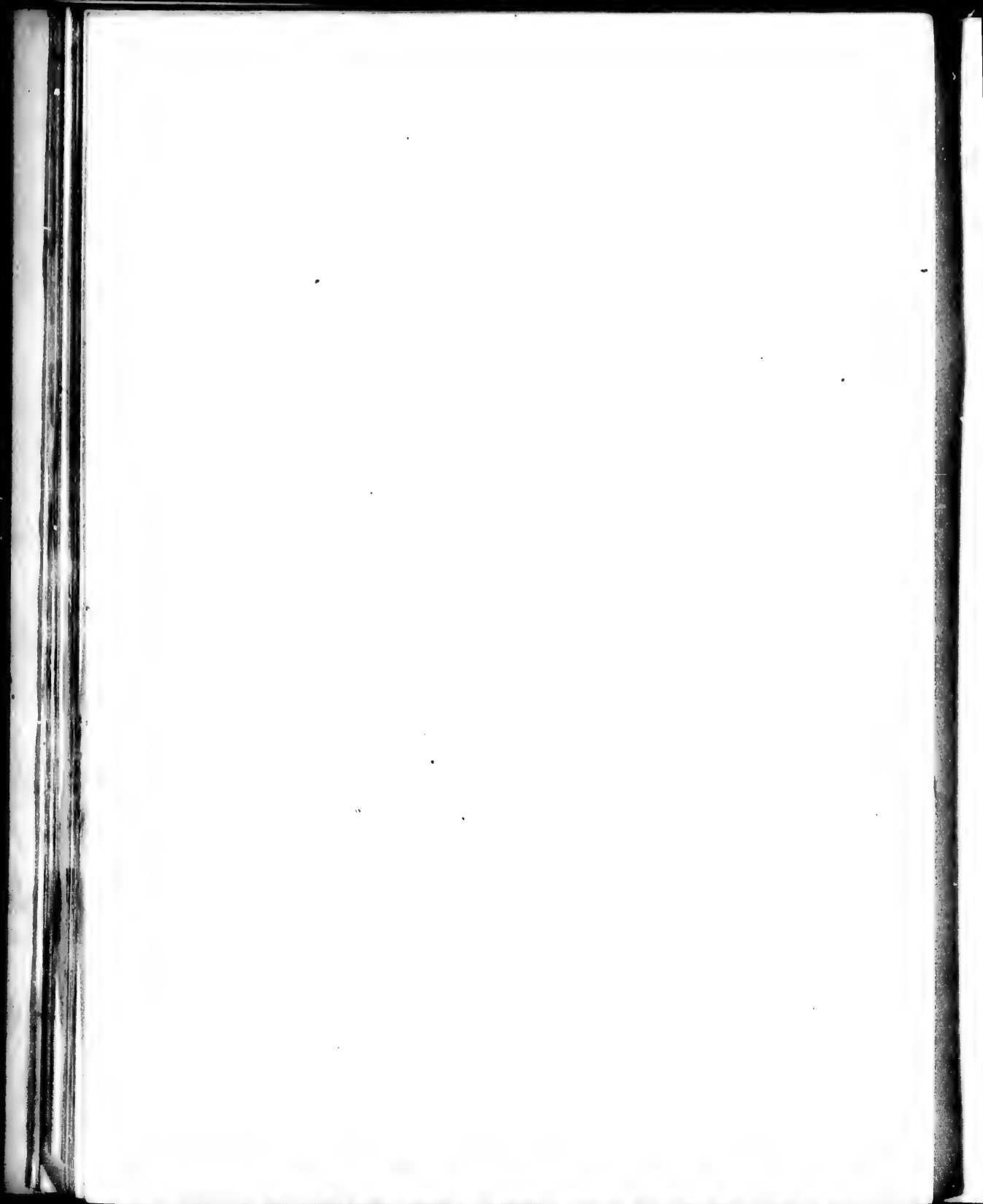
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A FEW WORDS
FROM THE
TRANSLATOR TO THE READER.

THIS magnificent work of the Abbé Orsini was recommended to me by those whose judgment carries weight in such matters, as the fullest and most compendious Life of the Mother of God, seeing that it does not break off, as most others do, at the close of her mortal life, but follows the course of the universal devotion wherewith the Church has honoured, and does still honour, this Queen of angels and of men. It shows how from age to age that devotion has grown and prospered coequal with Catholicity, and records the shrines and churches erected in every land under her invocation. It embodies the Eastern traditions concerning her, with the conclusive testimony of the Fathers; the little which is related of her in Scripture being but a faint sketch of her life.

There has been an *abridgment* of the *first* volume published in Dublin and republished here; but, as all the second volume was left out, the work in question is a small one, and has, consequently, no interference with this. The second volume is,



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indeed, the most interesting, as it contains the *Rise and Progress of the Devotion* to the Blessed Virgin, and I trust it will be found a valuable acquisition to our Catholic literature. It is a labour of love for a Catholic to celebrate the praises and publish the renown of our most dear Mother, and my only regret is that the translation of this work has not fallen into better hands. Such as it is, however, it is done with the pure intention of honouring the glorious Virgin, who obtains for every one of us so many and so great blessings, and of inspiring the heart of every reader with love and gratitude to her.

MONTREAL, October, 1853.



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LIFE

OF THE

BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

CHAPTER I.

UNIVERSAL EXPECTATION OF THE VIRGIN AND OF THE MESSIAH.

IN those remote times when the world was still in its infancy, when our first fathers, trembling and amazed, heard, under the majestic shades of Eden,* the awful voice of Jehovah condemning them to exile, to labour, and to death, in punishment of their mad disobedience, a mysterious prediction, wherein the pitying kindness of the Creator was manifested through the wrath of the offended Deity, came to raise the drooping spirits of those two frail creatures who had, like Lucifer, sinned through pride. A daughter of Eve, a woman of *masculine* courage, was to crush the head of the serpent beneath her feet, and to regenerate for ever a guilty race; that woman was Mary.

Thenceforward, it was a tradition amongst the antediluvian tribes that a woman should come to repair the evil which another

* The word *Eden*, amongst the Arabs as amongst the Hebrews, is the name of the terrestrial paradise, and also of the paradise of the elect. In Hebrew, it signifies a place of delight; in Arabic, a place proper for the grazing of flocks



had done; this consoling tradition, which kept up the hopes of a fallen race, had not yet been effaced from the minds of men, at the time of their grand dispersion on the plains of Sennaar; they carried with them, over seas and mountains, that sweet, though distant hope, together with the religion of Noah, and the wreck of art and science saved from the waters of the Deluge.* In after times, when the primitive religion faded away, and the ancient traditions were shrouded in obscurity, that of the Virgin and the Messiah resisted, almost alone, the action of time, and reared itself up on the ruin of ancient creeds, swallowed up in the fables of polytheism, like the evergreen which grows amid the ruins of what was once Babylon the great.†

Let us survey the various regions of the globe; let us search, from north to south, from east to west, the religious chronicles of the nations, we shall find the Virgin promised and her divine maternity at the basis of almost all theogonies.

In Thibet, in Japan, and in a portion of the eastern peninsula of India, it is the god Fo, who, to save mankind, became incarnate in the womb of the young betrothed of a king, the nymph Lhamoghiuprul, the fairest and holiest of women. In China, they

* It is certain that the race of primitive men, which was rustic, but not savage, early attained a knowledge of the arts analogous to their wants and pleasures. Scarcely do the children of Adam form into little communities of men, when we see them establish a public worship, fabricate tents, build towns, forge iron, run bronze, invent instruments of music, and follow the course of the stars. The history of Astronomy must be traced, according to Bailly, to an antediluvian people, of whom the memory is lost, but of whose astronomical knowledge some fragments escaped the general revolution. Lalande, fearing that this assertion might prove too much in favour of the Sacred Books, refers to the Egyptians the origin of this science; but the Hebrews, who, as neighbours, contemporaries, and ancient dwellers amongst the Egyptians, have a right to settle this difference, decide for Bailly, against his adversary, by informing us that the Egyptians derived their first astronomical knowledge from the traditions saved from the Deluge. (*See Joseph. Ant. Jud.*)

† There is but one single tree found amid the ruins of Babylon; the Persians give it the name of *Athèle*; according to them, that tree existed in the ancient city, and was miraculously preserved, to the end that their prophet Ali, the son-in-law of Mahomet, might fasten his horse to it after the battle of Hilla. It is an evergreen shrub, and so rare in those regions that there is only one other of the same kind, found at Bassora (*Rich's Memoir.*)

MARY FULL OF GRACE

CHAP. I.]

BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

3

reckon amongst the number of the *sons of Heaven* the Emperor Hoang-Ti, whose mother conceived by a flash of lightning; another emperor, Yao, who lived at the time of the Deluge, had for his mother a virgin who conceived from the beam of a star; Yu, the head of the first Chinese dynasty, owed his life to a pearl, (the emblem of light throughout all the East,)* which fell from heaven into the chaste bosom of a young maiden. Heou-Tsi, chief of the dynasty of Tcheou, changed not, by his birth, the virginity of his mother, who conceived him by divine operation, one day as she was in prayer, and brought him forth without effort and without pain in a deserted grotto, where lambs and oxen warmed him with their breath.† The most popular goddess of the Celestial Empire, Sching-Mou, conceived at the simple touch of a water-flower; her son, brought up under the roof of a poor fisherman, became a great man, and wrought miracles.

The lamas say that Buddha is born of the virgin Maha-Mahai. Sommonokhodom, the prince, the legislator, and the god of Siam, likewise owes his life to a virgin made fruitful by the rays of the sun. Lao-Tseu took flesh in the womb of a black virgin, *wonderful and fair as the jasper*. The zodiacal Isis of the Egyptians is a virgin mother. The Isis of the Druids was to bring forth the future Saviour.‡ The Brahmins teach that, when

* "The pearl," says Chardin, "has everywhere proper names: in the East, the Turks and Tartars call it *marjaun*, globe of light; the Persians, *marvid*, production of light."

† There are found in *Chi-king* two fine odes on this marvellous birth of Heou-Tsi, and the comments and paraphrases of the learned, on these verses, agree in explaining them in a way which renders the resemblance to the divine maternity of Mary still more striking. "Every child who is born," says Ho-sou, "rends the womb of his mother, and costs her the most cruel anguish. Kiang-Yuen brought forth hers without rupture, hurt, or pain. It is that *Tien* (Heaven) would thus display its power, and show how the Holy One differs from men." "Having been conceived by the operation of *Tien*," says another commentator, Tson-Tsong-Ho, "who gave him life by a miracle, he must needs be born without wounding the virginity of his mother."

‡ Hinc Druidæ statuum in intimis penetralibus erexerunt, Isidi seu virgini hanc dedicantes, ex qua filius ille proditurus erat (nempe generis humani Redemptor). (Elias Schedius, *de Diis Germanis*, cap. 13.)



a god assumes human flesh, he is conceived in the womb of a virgin, by divine operation; so also Jagrenat, the mutilated redeemer of the world,* Chrichna, born in a grotto where angels and shepherds came to adore him in his cradle, each of these has a virgin for his mother.

The Babylonian Dogdo sees in a dream a brilliant messenger from Oromazes, who deposits at her feet the most magnificent garments; a celestial light falls upon the face of the sleeper, who becomes fair as the *day-star*; Zerdhucht, Zoroaster, or rather Ebrahim-Zer-Ateucht,† the famous prophet of the Magi, is the fruit of this nocturnal vision. The tyrant Nimrod,‡ informed by his astrologers that a child, still

* *Jagrenat*, the seventh incarnation of Brahma, is represented in the form of a pyramid, without hands and without feet. "He lost them," say the Brahmins, "trying to carry the world, in order to save it." (See Kircher.)

† *Zer-Ateucht* signifies *washed with silver*; this surname was given to Zoroaster, because that, as the Ghebers say, he proved his mission, to a Sabeian prince who persecuted him, by plunging into a bath of molten silver. (See Tavernier, vol. ii. p. 92.)

‡ This Nemroud, whom Tavernier names Neubrout, is, according to some, Nimrod, the famous hunter; according to others, the tyrant Zhoiae, of the Persians, a king of the first dynasty of princes, who reigned immediately after the Deluge. According to the author of the *Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences*, Nemroud would be identical with Caïnaous, second king of the second dynasty of Persia, named the Caïanides. The Persian historians give him a reign of nearly two centuries, which must needs be rather long. By some he is represented as an impious man, who conceived the strange fancy of ascending to heaven, in a chest drawn by four of those monstrous birds called *kerkes*, mentioned by old Eastern writers in their romances. After having wandered some time through the air, he fell so heavily on a mountain, say the ancient legends of Persia, that it was shaken to its very base. According to the Persians, this Nimrod caused Zerdhucht, whom they confound with Abraham, to be cast into a fiery furnace; according to others, Nemroud was a Sabeian in religion, and it was he who first established the worship of fire. (D'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale*, t. iii. p. 32.) The Jews claim for Abraham, the father and the founder of their people, this persecution, of which the honour is given by the Persians to Zerdhucht, their legislator. St. Jerome relates an ancient tradition of the Jews, to the effect that Abraham had been cast into the fire by order of the Chaldeans, because he would not adore him. (Hieron., *Quest in Genes.*) This tradition is confirmed by Jewish writers much more modern; R. Chain, ben Adda mentions that Abraham, meeting a young girl carrying an idol, broke the latter in pieces; a complaint was immediately laid before Nemroud, who would have him, therefore, adore the fire. The patriarch gravely answered, that it would be much



SHALL MARY BE FULL OF GRACE?

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unborn, menaces his gods and his throne, causes all pregnant women to be put to death; Zerdhucht, however, is saved through the prudence and dexterity of his mother.* The Maceniques, who inhabit the shores of Lake Zarayas, in Paraguay, relate that at a very remote period a woman of rare beauty became a mother, yet remained a virgin; her son, after having wrought many extraordinary miracles, ascended one day into the open air, in presence of his disciples, and transformed himself into a sun.

Let all these scattered fragments of corrupted creeds be brought together, and they will make up, in nearly all its details, the history of the Virgin and her divine Son. The Virgin, notwithstanding the royal blood which flows through her veins, is of obscure condition, like the mother of Zoroaster; like her, too, she receives the visit of an angel bearing a message from Heaven. The tyrant Nemroud, who was the progenitor of a line of very wicked princes, may pass for the type of Herod, and is as anxious to compass the death of the young fire-worshipper as the sanguinary spouse of Mariamne to accomplish that of the infant Jesus; both miss their prey. Born of a virgin who conceives him during fervent prayer, and brings him forth without hurt or pain in a poor stable, like the first-born of the noble and pious Kiang-Yuen, our divine Saviour dwelt amongst the lower classes, like the son of the Chinese goddess; angels and shepherds come to render Him homage, as to Chrichna, on the very night of his birth; then, after having stilled the tempest, walked on the water, expelled demons, raised the dead to life, he ascends triumphantly into heaven in the presence of five hundred disciples, whose dazzled eyes lost him in the clouds, precisely as is related by the savage tribes of Paraguay.

It is assuredly very strange that these marvellous legends, which

more natural to worship water, which extinguishes fire, the clouds whence the water proceeds, the wind which gathers the clouds, and man who is a being much more perfect than the wind. Nemroud, irritated by this cutting rebuke, cast Abraham into the fire, which, however, did not harm him.

* See Tavernier, at the place quoted



have not been copied from the evangelical facts, since they are incontestably more ancient, yet form, when taken together, the real life of the Son of God. Can truth, then, spring from error? What are we to think of these fantastic associations? Shall we say, with the scoffing philosophers of the Voltairian school, and some German visionaries of a somewhat more recent date, that the Apostles borrowed these fables from the various creeds of Asia? But without speaking of the jealous care with which they hid the books reputed divine in the impenetrable darkness of the sanctuary; not to mention the profound horror wherewith the Jews regarded idolatrous legends, and their supreme contempt for foreign learning; how could poor, illiterate men, the extent of whose knowledge was to steer a bark over the waters of Genesareth, and whose nets were still dripping with its living waters when they were promoted to the Apostleship—how could laborious artisans, forced to toil for their daily bread during the intervals of their preaching—how could such as they have ransacked the sacred books of the Indians, the Chinese, the Bactrians, the Phenicians, and the Persians? What appearance is there that Simon Peter, the sons of Zebedee, or the austere disciple of Gamaliel, who boldly said to Corinth, that rich and learned Grecian city, *For myself, I know but one thing, Jesus, and Him crucified*, that these should have snatched from idolatry, which their mission was to destroy, some of its old tatters to sew upon the life of Jesus Christ—a life so simple and so grand! Still, if the question had only been of loans made from the fabulous legends of nations bordering on Palestine, such as the Egyptians and Phenicians, however unjust might have been the accusation, it would have had, at least, a show of probability; but no! these brilliant points, which detach themselves from the dark shades of idolatry to form, like so many little stars, the aureola of the Son of the Virgin, come from places the most distant and the least known. Not to speak of that Gaul, whose impenetrable forests hid, at the extremity of Western Europe, its mysterious creed under the shadow of giant oaks; of the great Indies, so imperfectly known in the time of Tiberias; of that Sereca of the porcelain towers, whose distant provinces did not tempt even the



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covetous Romans;* how could the Apostles have contrived to communicate with far America, separated from the old continent by her green belt of waves, and lost like a pearl amid the waters?

But, granting that the Apostles had known, no matter how, these ancient myths, disseminated over all the globe—nay, I will go farther still, and, laying aside native simplicity, the sealed testimony of blood, the high sanctity of these divine men, carried away, as Rousseau says, with zeal for their Master's glory, I will suppose that the idea had occurred to them to embroider some fabulous circumstances on the evangelical tissue—why, the thing would have passed their *power*. With what face, for instance, could they have attributed to that Herod, whom all Jerusalem had known, whose reign, so glorious and yet so tragical, each one knew by heart, an atrocious and improbable fact, renewed from I know not what king of Persia, who, perhaps, never existed save in the dreams of the Magi? If the massacre of the Innocents had been a story fabricated or copied by the Apostles, is it to be believed that the Bethlehemites, so likely to know what was passing in the Holy City, whose lofty towers darkened their horizon, would not have openly protested against that audacious falsehood; or that those cunning Pharisees, who would fain have confounded Jesus himself, would have let such a story become current without attempting to refute it; or that the Herodians would have tamely suffered a stain so foul to be falsely imprinted on the fame of a prince whom they regarded almost as a god,† and who had loaded them with wealth and honours? If all were silent, it is because the fact was too well accredited, too public, too recent, to leave any plausible pretence for denial; it is because that, within two hours' walk of Jerusalem, were the mothers of

* It was under the reign of Augustus that the Roman people received the first ambassador from the Seres, whom we now call Chinese. The ambassadors pretended that it had taken them three years to make the journey.

† The flatterers of Herod the First, dazzled with the greatness and magnificence of that prince, maintained that he was the *Messiah*. Hence arose the sect of the Herodians, so often mentioned in the Gospel, and even known to the Pagans, since Persus and his scholiast inform us that, from the days of Nero, the birth of King Herod was celebrated by his sectaries with the same solemnity as the Sabbath.

the martyrs who had purchased with their young lives the honour of being born with Christ; it is because that whole towns had seen the glitter of the murderous steel, and heard the wail of death; it is because that, at the first denial given to the Christians, a whole nation would have risen and shouted, *But we were there!**

So it is with the divine child-bearing of Mary—the visit of the shepherds sent by the angels—the glorious resurrection—and, in short, with all the prodigies which marked the coming of Christ. The Apostles wrote during the lifetime of those who had figured in the scenes they related; and, before even they consigned these prodigies to writing, they had openly preached them in the very temple of Jehovah, before that immense assemblage of Hebrews from all the provinces, who repaired thither either to offer sacrifice or to bring first-fruits; the most dangerous auditory in the world, if they had promulgated falsehood.

Far from fearing contradictions, which in case of imposture must needs have followed, St. Peter speaks to that vast multitude as one sure of the general assent; he boldly appeals to the yet recent remembrance of those who hear him; he asserts the miracles which stamped as divine the mission of the Son of Mary, and that even before the great council of the nation, which had exerted all its power to have Jesus crucified. And the senators of Israel, frightened and furious, cause St. Peter and St. John to be beaten with rods, in order to make them keep silence; but yet they deny

* "Neither Josephus nor the Rabbins speak of the massacre of the Innocents," says Strauss; "Macrobus, who lived in the fourth century, is the only writer who says a word of the massacre decreed by Herod." Strauss is in error; the Toldos, from whom Celsus has taken some of the facts prejudicial to Christianity, which he has interspersed through his writings, do speak positively on the subject, and the fact is in the Talmud. This is the way in which Bossuet answers those who deny the evangelical fact, and never was answer more definitive. "Where are those," says he, "who, in order to confirm their faith, would wish that the profane historians of that age had mentioned this cruelty of Herod, as well as all the others? Just as though our faith ought to depend on what the negligence or affected policy of worldly historians has made them record or omit in their histories! Far from us be such weak imaginings; even in a human point of view, the Evangelist would have been very careful not to compromise the character of his narrative by recording a fact which was not well authenticated."

THE MARY FULL OF GRACE

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9

now, as the Talmud shows, those prodigies which they stupidly attribute to magic. Thus it is that they say not to the Apostles brought before them by the guards of the Temple, "Ye are liars or visionaries!" they only tell them, with an agitation which plainly indicates their secret fears, "Be silent! will ye that we be stoned by the people?" Whereupon those two men, simple in heart, but great in soul, made answer: "We cannot be silent! God commands us to speak, and Him must we obey rather than men." Imposture is not so bold or confident.

After having examined the acts, the character, and the position of the Apostles, every impartial mind will be forced to admit that they were neither deceiving nor deceived, and that they have nothing to do with the conformities remarked between the evangelical facts and the traditions, more or less fabulous, of the ancient nations.

But, then, how to explain these analogies? Is it a mere game of chance, a lucky coincidence?

No, it is not by chance that the mystery of the incarnation of a God in the womb of a virgin is one of the fundamental doctrines of Asia. It is not by chance that the privileged women who bear in their womb that emanation of the Divinity are always chaste, beautiful, and holy; that they have glorious and mysterious names, which signify, in all these ancient tongues, *expected beauty*, *immaculate virgin*, *faithful virgin*, *delight of mankind*, *polar star*; and that they are all so much alike that one would say they were moulded on a far-off type hidden from us by the darkness of time. Finally, it is not by chance that a luminous ray unites the divine and human nature.

These notions, wherein the stamp of a primitive time is so plainly visible, evidently ascend to the birth of the world. The antediluvian patriarchs, that chain of old men who lived the age of cedars, wishing to form for themselves an idea of the woman blessed amongst all others, whose miraculous maternity was to save mankind, represented her to themselves under the likeness of Eve before her fall; they gave her a majestic and saintly beauty, which could awake in the minds of men no other feeling save that of religious veneration; they made her a mild and



veiled star, whose dawn was to precede that of the Sun of Justice.

The means whereby God gave fecundity to that virginal womb are strikingly alike, amongst the different nations of the world. Cast a glance over all the old religions, and you will there find a sacred fire. But the fire was, for the Persians, the terrestrial emblem of the sun, and the sun himself was but the dwelling of the Most High, the glorious tent of the God of Heaven.*

The Hebrews, who shared in this belief, recognised the divine presence, or the *shekina*, in the radiant cloud which overhung the cherubim of the mercy-seat. They believed that God clothed himself with light as with a garment, when manifesting himself to men, on solemn occasions. It was the opinion of the Synagogue, supported by the tradition of the Temple, that in the midst of the wild rose-bush, which burned without being consumed, when Moses, that great shepherd of men, was tending, on Mount Horeb, the flocks of his Arab father-in-law, there was seen a very lovely face, resembling nothing that is seen here below; and that this celestial image, clearer than the flame and more brilliant than the lightning, was, without doubt, the image of the Eternal God.† With this premise, it is not difficult to understand the drift of the opinion, so generally diffused, that a luminous ray was to impart fecundity to the womb of the favoured virgin who was the expectation of all people.

With this graceful tradition of a pure virgin admitted to a divine union, surrounded by impenetrable mystery, was connected that of a Saviour God, born of her womb, who was to suffer and die for the salvation of the world.‡ This tradition was not perpetuated, like the other, by means of brilliant and poetical images, but by terror, which makes an impression far more indelible than poetry. The bloody sacrifice, which we find established

* "The Persians suppose that the throne of God is in the sun," says Hanway, "and hence their veneration for that star."

† Philon, *Vie de Moïse* (*Life of Moses*).

‡ This tradition is found in the sacred books of China. (See Father Premare's work, entitled, *Selecta quadam vestigia præcipuorum Christianæ religionis dogmatum ex antiquis libris eruta.*)

from the earliest times, amongst nearly all nations, was solely intended to preserve amongst men the remembrance of the promised immolation of Calvary. This is easily proved.

Worship, that demonstration of love, that homage of gratitude which Adam and Eve were to render to God immediately after their creation, was, in Eden, doubtless composed of only innocent prayers and oblations of fruits and flowers.* But when they—ungrateful that they were—had infringed upon the precept, so easy in observance, which the Lord had imposed, like a sweet yoke, upon them, merely to make them feel that they had a master; when they had lost, with the immortalizing fruits of the tree of life,† their talisman against death,‡ and descended from the charming hills of Eden to a land bristling with briars and thorns, to a land whose virgin bosom they must open to nourish

* Porphy. *de Abst.*, lib. ii.

† God might annex to the plants certain natural virtues for the sake of our bodies, and it is easy to believe that the fruit of the tree of life had the virtue of restoring the body, by an aliment so proportionate and so efficacious that none could ever die while using it. (Bossuet, *Elév. sur les Myst.*, t. i. p. 231.)

‡ Man was never immortal, in this world, as the pure spirits are, for a body formed of dust must needs return to dust; he was so only by a favour, without precedent, and conditionally granted, whereby he was elevated to, and maintained in, a position far above his proper sphere. Immortality here below never yet belonged to man as a birthright. Every earthly body is to perish through the dissolution of its parts, unless prevented by a special decree of the Creator; this divine will was manifested in favour of our first parents. God planted, in the delicious garden where he had placed a mortal man, the tree of life, a plant of celestial origin, which had the property of repelling death, as the laurel, according to the ancients, keeps off the thunder. To that mysterious tree was attached the immortality of the human species; away from that protecting tree, death again seized his prey, and man was hurled from the height of heaven into his miserable tenement of clay. (Aug., *Quæst. Vet. et Nov. Test.*, q. 19, p. 430.) No one will question, I fancy, that God had an undoubted right to expel Adam from the garden after his disobedience; but the expulsion involved the sentence of death for man and his posterity; without the tree of life, he was nothing more than a frail and perishable creature, subject to the laws which govern created bodies: when the antidote is wanting, it is very evident that the poison kills. Having again become mortal, Adam begot sons mortal like himself. The condition into which the father had fallen must needs be that of the children. In that, God did no wrong to the human race; we are, by nature, mortal; He has left us as we were. To withdraw a gratuitous favour, when the object of that favour tears with his own hands the deed of gift, is assuredly not severity, but only justice.

themselves; they added to the fruits and wild flowers produced by the land of exile, the first fruits of their flocks. This merits attention. Adam, who joined to the perfection of the human form an intelligent and elevated mind, wherein the Lord had planted the germ of all virtue and of all knowledge, could not be void of humanity. His fatal complaisance to Eve shows him loving even to weakness, and therefore susceptible, in the highest degree, of all kindly feelings and affections. How could it, then, occur to him that the Creator would take pleasure in the violent death of his creature, or that an act of destruction was an act of piety?

The immolation of animals, which has not the slightest connection with the vows and prayers of man, and which the purely vegetable food of the first patriarchs left without other object than that of murder, must needs have excited a thousand feelings of disgust and repugnance in the mind of our common father. Long had these poor, dumb creatures, devoid of reason, but very capable of attachment, composed, in Eden, the court of that solitary king. He then seated himself at the same table, slept on the same mossy hillock, quenched his thirst at the same spring, and his prayer ascended to heaven, at early dawn and evening's close, with the warbling of the birds, who seemed to sing, in their turn, the morning or evening hymn. Those companions of his happier days, involved in his misfortune, now shared his exile:* some,

* The time that Adam and Eve remained in the terrestrial paradise is not exactly known; it must, nevertheless, have been of some duration, and so it was understood by Milton, whom we do not here quote as a poet, but as a profound Oriental scholar. Moreover, if we remember that it was in Eden that Adam learned to distinguish and to call by name all the birds of the air, the beasts of the earth, and the fishes of the water; that he there learned the virtues of plants, and what God chose to teach him regarding the course of the stars; we must then conclude that all this was not the work of a day. The Persians and the Chinese have it that the first man was in Paradise for many ages. The Arabs and the Rabbins say that he was there only half a day; but, according to them, that half day in Paradise was equivalent to five hundred years; for a day there was equal to a thousand years. According to our views, that period of time is much too long. It is commonly believed that Cain, whose birth, in Genesis, follows closely upon the expulsion of his parents, was born in the year of the world 13, which would leave the stay in Paradise in or about twelve years. That term, although somewhat short, would

giving way to the ferocious instinct which in Paradise had remained undeveloped, fled to the depth of the wilderness or the secret caverns of the mountains, whence they soon waged deadly warfare against their former master. Others, mild and inoffensive by nature, establish themselves around the grotto of their lord, to whom they offered, to satisfy his wants and soothe his cares, their milk, their labour, their fleece, and their melodious concerts. Well, it was from the ranks—thin they were, too—of these humble friends, faithful in misfortune, that Adam selected, counted, and marked his victims; it was into the throat of the heifer who had given him milk, of the dove who had flown to his bosom for shelter when the vulture hovered in the air, of the lamb that quitted its flowery pasture to lick his hand, that he had the heart to plunge his knife. Ah! when man, yet unpractised in killing, struck down at his feet a poor, timid creature, and saw it bleeding and struggling in the agony of death, he must have stood pale and horror-stricken like the assassin who has just committed his first murder! That thought never occurred to him; it was not an act of choice, but of painful obedience. Who imposed it upon him? He to whom alone it belongs to dispose of life and death—God!

Adam committed a sin so enormous by its aggravating circumstances and its disastrous consequences, that, in order to express its full extent, the Hebrew tradition relates that the sun hid his face in horror.* Satan attacked him in his strength, at a time when, as yet, he knew naught but good, in the fairest of earth's scenes, under the recent impression of the immense benefit of creation, free, happy, tranquil, immortal, and capable of resisting, if he had chosen to do so. It was from this height that he fell

have, nevertheless, enabled the first man to establish his supremacy over the animals subject to him, and to attach him to his humble dependants by the ties of habit.

* It is in remembrance of the sin of Eve, at sight of which, according to the Jews, the sun hid his light, that the Jewish women are specially charged to light the lamps which burn in every house during the Sabbath night. "It is just," say the Hebrew doctors, "that women should rekindle the flame which they have extinguished, and that they be charged with that trouble, in expiation of their sin." (Basn., lib. vii. ch. 13.)

into the fearful abyss of disobedience and ingratitude. The justice of God demanded a punishment proportionate to the offence; man was condemned to die a double death, and it was all over with the human species, had not a Divine Being, predestined before the birth of time to the work of our redemption, taken it upon himself to make satisfaction for us all. Thenceforward he was called the Messiah, and revealed as a Saviour, at the very moment when the voice of God—that voice which rends the cedars—pronounced the sentence of the three criminals. "Because thou hast done this thing," said God to the serpent, who showed himself proud of our ruin, "the seed of the woman—that is to say, her offspring—shall crush thy head."

And the Hebrew tradition adds that God, touched by the repentance of our first parents, had it revealed to them by an angel, that from their race should arise a just man who would annihilate the pernicious effects of the tree of knowledge,* by means of a voluntary oblation, and would be the salvation of those who put their trust in Him.† On the other side, we learn from the Arab traditions that God, who is merciful and indulgent, would vouchsafe to point out to man the way to implore his forgiveness. That worship, revealed by God, was undoubtedly sacrifice, a ceremony at once commemorative, expiatory, and symbolical, whereby man acknowledged that he had deserved death, and, substituting for himself innocent victims, kept perpetually before his mind the great victim of Calvary.

Thus, then, the institution of the bloody sacrifice, which was not of human invention, rested, at bottom, on a conception of Divine mercy, since it perpetuated, amongst all nations, that

* It is generally considered, amongst Christians, that the tree of knowledge was an apple-tree; the Persians maintain, on the contrary, that this fatal tree was a fig-tree. In our days, the German Eichhorn makes it out to have been a species of manchineel. "A deduction made from the wonders attending on the fall of man," says that Rationalist writer, "the fact is evident that the constitution of the human body has been, from the beginning, vitiated by the use of a poisonous fruit." (Eichhorn's *Argeschichte*.)

† Basnage, lib. vi ch. 25, p. 417.



tradition of the Messiah, without which the work of the Redemption would have been a favour thrown away.

God ripens his councils by ages, for a thousand years are to Him but as one day; but man is eager to obtain, for man lasts but a short time. It appears that Eve had concluded, from the words of the angel, that she was to be the mother of the promised Redeemer, and that this was the reason why she testified such transports of joy on the birth of Cain,* whom she took for her Saviour. Undeceived by the development of his perverse inclinations, she transferred her hopes to Abel, that son so fondly loved, whose name recalls the mourning and tears of his mother;† then to Seth;‡ but all in vain, for the gates of Paradise never opened again for her. The just of the race of Seth, those pure, solitary, and contemplative men called in Scripture the children of God, and in the Assyrian legends genii, they long flattered themselves with a similar hope; and the Jewish tradition represents them as wandering on the heights around the garden of Eden,§ whose

* Cain is called *Cabel* by all the Arab writers; that name, which means the *first*, is perhaps his proper name. The surname of Cain, which signifies *traitor*, must have been subsequently given him. (Savary, *note to Ch. V. of the Koran*.)

† Abel, by the Arabs written *Habel*, is, according to them, only the surname of that young shepherd who was the first type of Jesus Christ. In fact, it recalls the sad event which threw the family of Adam into mourning, "and properly signifies," says Savary (place quoted), *His death has left a mother in tears*. Josephus, too, says that the name of Abel signifies mourning. (*Antiq. Jud.*, p. 4.)

‡ See Basnage, lib. vi. ch. 25.

§ The Arabian traditions place the terrestrial paradise in that fair valley of Damascus which the Eastern poets designate as the emerald of the desert. This idea is justified by its admirable situation, its beauty, and its fertility; and a learned commentator on Genesis has not hesitated to set down this fair site as that of the garden of Eden, although the names of the Euphrates and the Tigris indicate a position somewhat different. In support of this Arab tradition there is shown, about half a day's journey from Damascus, a lofty mountain of white marble, shaded with beautiful trees, and therein is a cavern, pointed out as the abode of Adam, of Abel, and of Cain; there is also seen the sepulchre of Abel, which is much respected by the Turks. The spot whereon the fratricide was committed is marked by four pillars. (D'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale*, p. 772 and 780.—Père Pacifique, in his *Commentaries on the Bible*.)

gigantic cedars they wistfully admired,* and flattered themselves the while that from amongst themselves should arise a just man who would obtain admission for them. But it was not the name of a virgin of the primitive times that was written in the immutable decrees of the Eternal; and the earth, still quivering under the divine malediction, had need of being washed as by the ablution of a baptism, before the foot of Him who was to bring the glad tidings should leave its sacred impress on the mountains.

When the earth had absorbed the waters of the Deluge, and the winds had dried it up, the new human family, springing into life under favourable auspices, hastened to re-establish the worship of Enos. Noah joined thereto the seven precepts which bear his name, not forgetting the historical and religious traditions which his long existence prior to the Deluge had enabled him to gather. He told how man was formed of clay, his rebellion, his fall, and his future reparation, which the world was to owe to the miraculous maternity of a new Eve. At sight of the bloody sacrifice offered for the unexpiated crime of their first parents, he taught his descendants to raise their eyes to a more august victim, seated at the right hand of Jehovah, in the starry depths of heaven—a victim whereof the oblation of lambs and heifers was but the figure.†

These primitive notions were at first faithfully retained by the nations, and are found at the basis of all creeds.‡ Altars were

* The lofty cedars of Eden have remained traditionally in the memory of the Hebrews, who have made the terrestrial paradise their Heaven. In most of their epitaphs we read these words: "He is gone down to the garden of Eden to those who are amongst the cedars." (Basnage, t. v. lib. vii.)

† All the ancient law bears an aspect of blood and death in figure of the new law established and confirmed by the blood of Jesus Christ. (Bossuet, *Elév. sur les Myst.*, t. i. p. 428.)

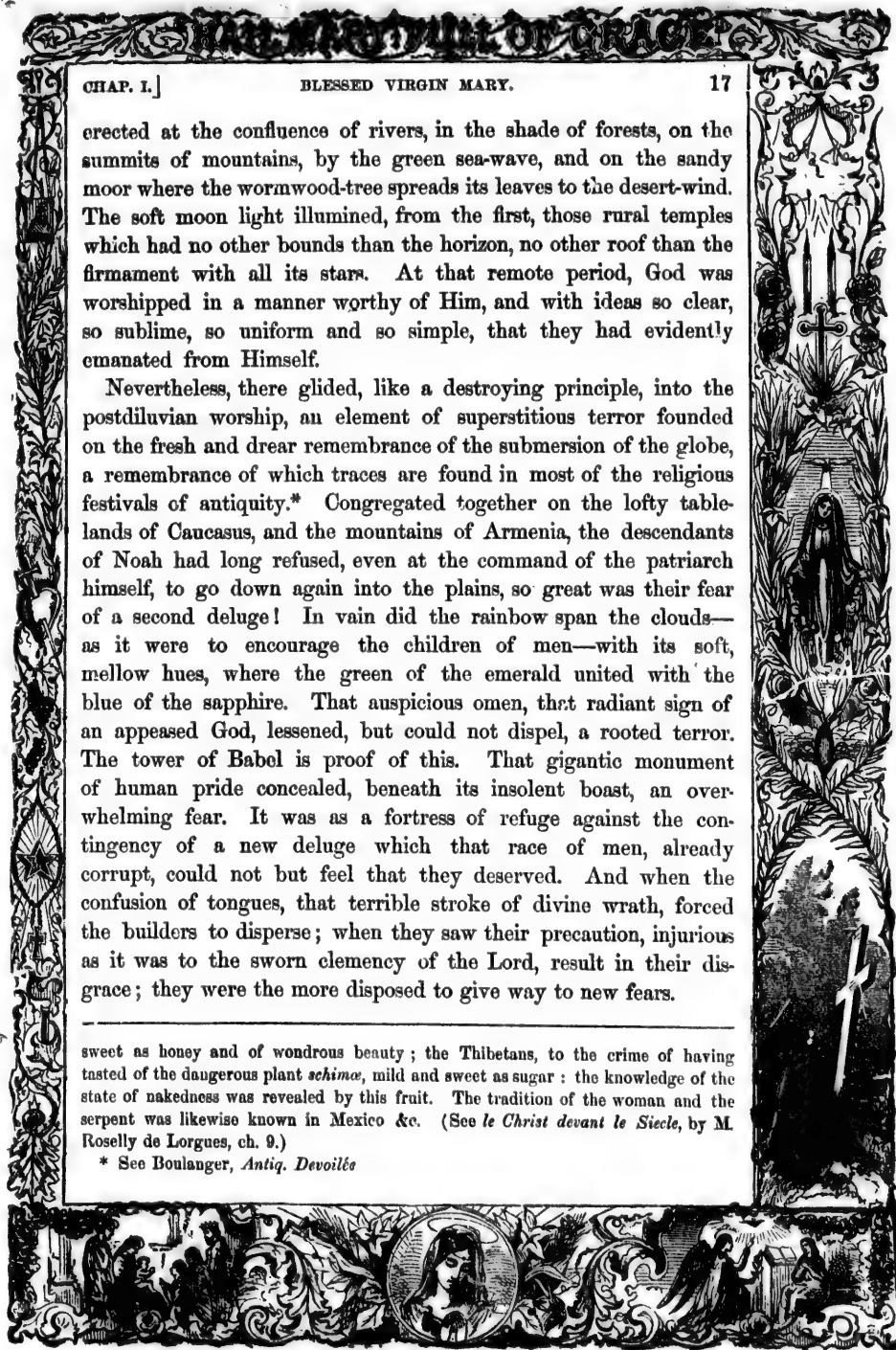
‡ The Indians, the Chinese, the Peruvians, and even the Hurons, acknowledge that the first man was formed of clay. The Brahmins, who make delightful representations of their *chorcam* (paradise), place therein a tree whose fruit would confer immortality if it could be eaten. The Persians relate that the genius of evil, Ahriman, seduced our first parents under the form of a snake. The story of the woman seduced at the foot of a tree, the anger of God, and the first fratricide, was traditionally told amongst the Iroquois. The Tartars attribute our fall to a plant

erected at the confluence of rivers, in the shade of forests, on the summits of mountains, by the green sea-wave, and on the sandy moor where the wormwood-tree spreads its leaves to the desert-wind. The soft moon light illumined, from the first, those rural temples which had no other bounds than the horizon, no other roof than the firmament with all its stars. At that remote period, God was worshipped in a manner worthy of Him, and with ideas so clear, so sublime, so uniform and so simple, that they had evidently emanated from Himself.

Nevertheless, there glided, like a destroying principle, into the postdiluvian worship, an element of superstitious terror founded on the fresh and drear remembrance of the submersion of the globe, a remembrance of which traces are found in most of the religious festivals of antiquity.* Congregated together on the lofty tablelands of Caucasus, and the mountains of Armenia, the descendants of Noah had long refused, even at the command of the patriarch himself, to go down again into the plains, so great was their fear of a second deluge! In vain did the rainbow span the clouds—as it were to encourage the children of men—with its soft, mellow hues, where the green of the emerald united with the blue of the sapphire. That auspicious omen, that radiant sign of an appeased God, lessened, but could not dispel, a rooted terror. The tower of Babel is proof of this. That gigantic monument of human pride concealed, beneath its insolent boast, an overwhelming fear. It was as a fortress of refuge against the contingency of a new deluge which that race of men, already corrupt, could not but feel that they deserved. And when the confusion of tongues, that terrible stroke of divine wrath, forced the builders to disperse; when they saw their precaution, injurious as it was to the sworn clemency of the Lord, result in their disgrace; they were the more disposed to give way to new fears.

sweet as honey and of wondrous beauty; the Thibetans, to the crime of having tasted of the dangerous plant *schima*, mild and sweet as sugar: the knowledge of the state of nakedness was revealed by this fruit. The tradition of the woman and the serpent was likewise known in Mexico &c. (See *le Christ devant le Siecle*, by M. Roselly de Lorgues, ch. 9.)

* See Boulanger, *Antiq. Devoilée*



It must, however, be admitted, in extenuation of their fault, that the spectacle then presented by the earth was far from cheering. The whole economy of the creation was upset. The rivers, diverted from their channels, formed immense ponds and putrid marshes* in those vast plains, adorned, before the Deluge, with the graceful tents of the shepherds. The cedars lay prostrate on the sea-shore, whilst the spoils of the ocean were found amongst the eternal snows of the loftiest mountains. On every side were seen towers levelled to the ground,† and cities silent and in ruins. The ploughshare everywhere notched on bones and rubbish. The avenging hand of an angry God had fallen so crushingly that man, whose heart still palpitated with fear, remembering the risk he had run, was more disposed to fear his Sovereign Master with a mighty fear than to love him with confiding love; he had learned to fear God! He doubted his promises and his goodness. Like the drowning mariner, he eagerly sought, around him, some helping object, which might interpose between them, and ward off, at need, that just but terrible wrath. Noah had spoken to them of an influential and divine Being whose tenderness for men was infinite, and who was to plead their cause before the Eternal, and take upon himself their crimes; but who was that privileged mediator, that powerful advocate? They knew not. The descendants of Shem believed that they had found him in the stars which cheered their solitary watch, and which they supposed inhabited by celestial

* History has preserved us proofs of this displacing of rivers after the Deluge. We read in Strabo, book II., that the Araxes, which waters Armenia, was still without a vent, and inundated the country, when Jason, chief of the Aeronauts, opened a subterranean channel, whereby the Araxes flowed into the Caspian sea. In the famous *Chou-King* of Confucius, the Emperor Yao says that the waters, which had once risen to heaven, still bathed the feet of the highest mountains, and rendered the plains impassable.—(Freret, *Chron. des Chinois*, 1st part.)

† The tower of Babel, so immediately after the great Deluge, may furnish an idea of the antediluvian architecture. Brick and pitch were the materials used. If this immense tower, as there is every reason to believe, resembled the ancient and famous tower of Bel in Babylon, it was surrounded by an exterior staircase, on a gentle slope, which wound up to the flat roof, and gave the building the appearance of seven successive towers.

spirits;* they engaged those spirits to protect them, and kindled fires in their honour on the mountain-tops.†

This was the origin of Sabeism, which degenerated into idolatry when the accursed race of Cham, attaching themselves to the material object, adored the fire, the water, the earth, the rustling breeze; and in scornful mockery of the primitive worship, which knew not the use of images, they consecrated to the moon statues of silver, and to the sun statues of gold.‡

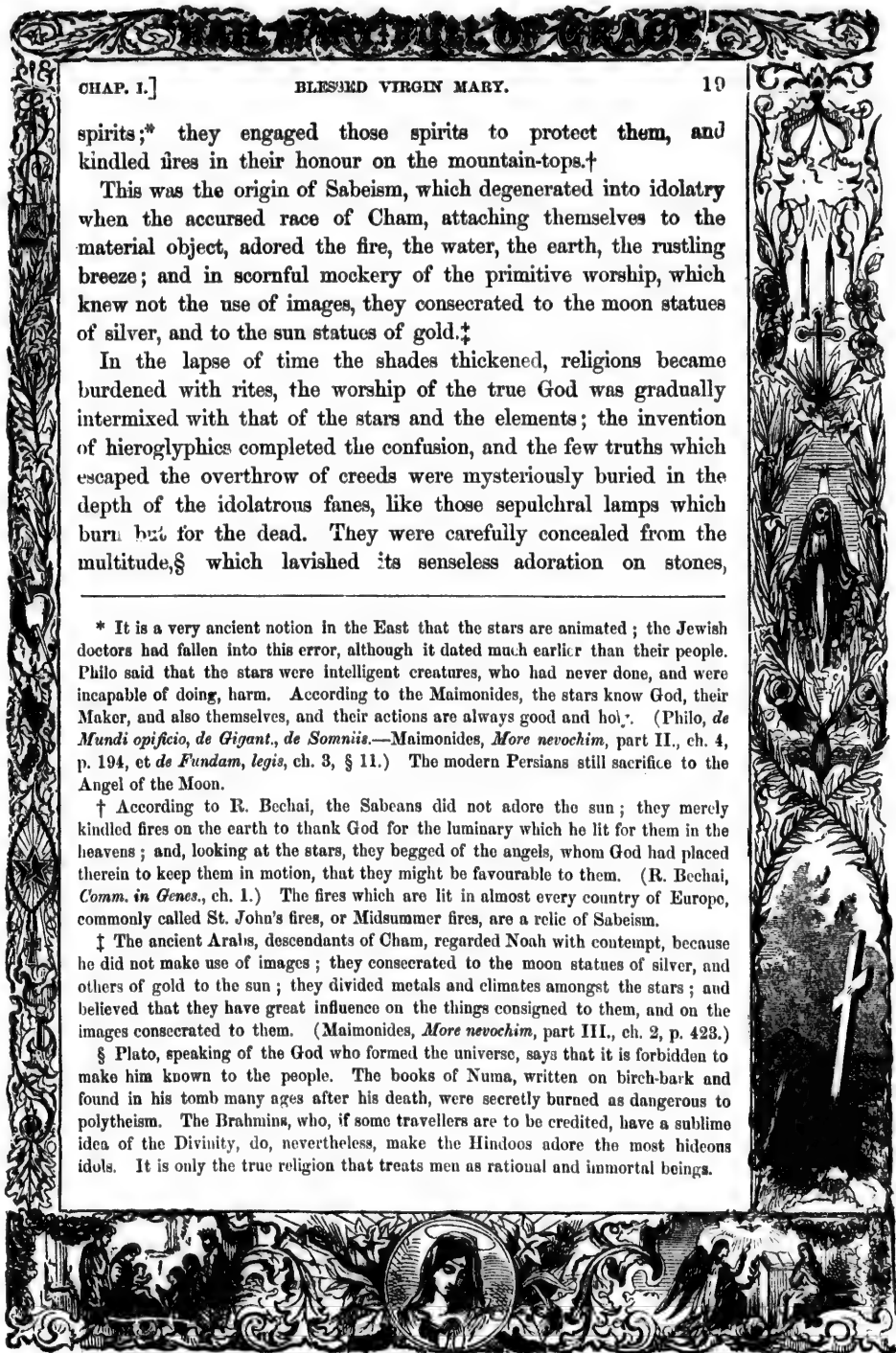
In the lapse of time the shades thickened, religions became burdened with rites, the worship of the true God was gradually intermixed with that of the stars and the elements; the invention of hieroglyphics completed the confusion, and the few truths which escaped the overthrow of creeds were mysteriously buried in the depth of the idolatrous fanes, like those sepulchral lamps which burn but for the dead. They were carefully concealed from the multitude,§ which lavished its senseless adoration on stones,

* It is a very ancient notion in the East that the stars are animated; the Jewish doctors had fallen into this error, although it dated much earlier than their people. Philo said that the stars were intelligent creatures, who had never done, and were incapable of doing, harm. According to the Maimonides, the stars know God, their Maker, and also themselves, and their actions are always good and holy. (Philo, *de Mundi officio*, *de Gigant.*, *de Somniis*.—Maimonides, *More nevochim*, part II., ch. 4, p. 194, et *de Fundam. legis*, ch. 3, § 11.) The modern Persians still sacrifice to the Angel of the Moon.

† According to R. Bechai, the Sabeans did not adore the sun; they merely kindled fires on the earth to thank God for the luminary which he lit for them in the heavens; and, looking at the stars, they begged of the angels, whom God had placed therein to keep them in motion, that they might be favourable to them. (R. Bechai, *Comm. in Genes.*, ch. 1.) The fires which are lit in almost every country of Europe, commonly called St. John's fires, or Midsummer fires, are a relic of Sabeism.

‡ The ancient Arabs, descendants of Cham, regarded Noah with contempt, because he did not make use of images; they consecrated to the moon statues of silver, and others of gold to the sun; they divided metals and climates amongst the stars; and believed that they have great influence on the things consigned to them, and on the images consecrated to them. (Maimonides, *More nevochim*, part III., ch. 2, p. 423.)

§ Plato, speaking of the God who formed the universe, says that it is forbidden to make him known to the people. The books of Numa, written on birch-bark and found in his tomb many ages after his death, were secretly burned as dangerous to polytheism. The Brahmins, who, if some travellers are to be credited, have a sublime idea of the Divinity, do, nevertheless, make the Hindoos adore the most hideous idols. It is only the true religion that treats men as rational and immortal beings.



trees, rivers, mountains, and on animals—a worship more degrading still—and which ended at last by deifying the very vices and passions. It was then that impostors, speculating on human credulity, either entangled or deliberately broke the slight thread of the patriarchal traditions, and, audaciously substituting memory for hope, grouped around the cradles of their fabulous kings, their false prophets, or their powerless divinities, the wonders of the Incarnation of the Word, and the primitive revelations of his high and tragical destiny.

This, we think, is the explanation of those analogies which are, at first sight, incomprehensible.

Nevertheless, all the heathen nations did not take the mystery of the Messiah as a fact accomplished. The Druids, just before the Christian era, were still raising altars, in the gloomy forests of Gaul, to the Virgin *who is to bring forth*. The Chinese—instructed by Confucius, who had himself found that oracle in old traditions—expected the HOLY ONE, *born of a Virgin, and Son of God, who was to die for the salvation of the world,** in the western regions of Asia, and sent to seek him, by solemn embassy, less than half a century after the death of the Man-God. The Magi, on the faith of Zerdhucht, studied the constellations in quest of the star of Jacob, which was to guide them to the cradle of Christ.† The Brahmins sighed for the glorious *avatar*‡ of him who was to purge the world of sin, and begged it of Wichnou, laying on his jewelled altar odorous stuffs of sweet basil, a plant beloved by the Indian god. The haughty children of Romulus,

* "According to the ancient sages of China," says the learned Schmitt, "the Holy One, the miraculous man, will renew the universe, change its morals, expiate the sins of the world, die overwhelmed with sorrow and opprobrium, and open the gates of heaven." (See *Redemption of Mankind*, by that author.)

† Abulfarages (*Historia Dynastiarum*) says that Zerdhucht prophesied to the Magi the birth of the Messiah, sprung from a virgin. He added that at the time of his birth there should arise an unknown star to guide them to his cradle, and he commanded them to bring presents with them when they went. Sharistani, a Mussulman author, also relates a prediction of Zerdhucht respecting a great prophet who was to reform the world as well in religion as in justice, and to whom kings and princes were to be submissive.

‡ *Avatar*, the fabulous incarnation of a Hindoo deity.

those idolaters by excellence, who had created whole legions of gods, read in the books so jealously and so wisely kept by the sibyl of Cumes, a contemporary of Achilles and Hæctor, *the virgin, the divine infant, the adoration of the shepherds, the serpent crushed, and the golden age restored to the earth.* Finally, about the time of the Messiah, all the nations of the East were in expectation of a future SAVIOUR; and Boulanger, (who was better inspired on his death-bed,) after having shown how generally that hope was diffused, illogically calls it a universal chimera.*

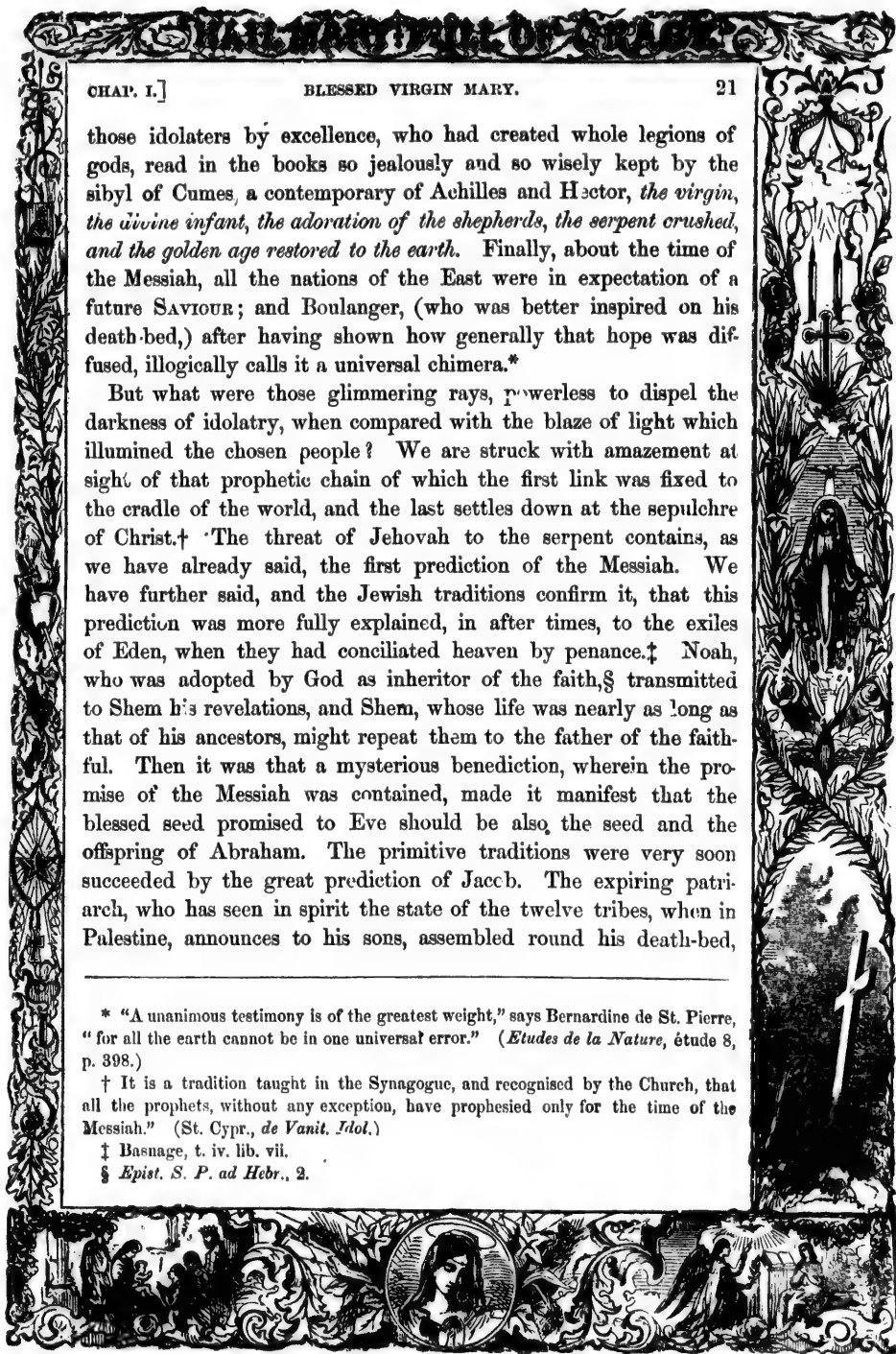
But what were those glimmering rays, powerless to dispel the darkness of idolatry, when compared with the blaze of light which illumined the chosen people? We are struck with amazement at sight of that prophetic chain of which the first link was fixed to the cradle of the world, and the last settles down at the sepulchre of Christ.† The threat of Jehovah to the serpent contains, as we have already said, the first prediction of the Messiah. We have further said, and the Jewish traditions confirm it, that this prediction was more fully explained, in after times, to the exiles of Eden, when they had conciliated heaven by penance.‡ Noah, who was adopted by God as inheritor of the faith,§ transmitted to Shem his revelations, and Shem, whose life was nearly as long as that of his ancestors, might repeat them to the father of the faithful. Then it was that a mysterious benediction, wherein the promise of the Messiah was contained, made it manifest that the blessed seed promised to Eve should be also the seed and the offspring of Abraham. The primitive traditions were very soon succeeded by the great prediction of Jacob. The expiring patriarch, who has seen in spirit the state of the twelve tribes, when in Palestine, announces to his sons, assembled round his death-bed,

* "A unanimous testimony is of the greatest weight," says Bernardine de St. Pierre, "for all the earth cannot be in one universal error." (*Etudes de la Nature*, étude 8, p. 398.)

† It is a tradition taught in the Synagogue, and recognised by the Church, that all the prophets, without any exception, have prophesied only for the time of the Messiah." (St. Cypr., *de Vanit. Idol.*)

‡ Basnage, t. iv. lib. vii.

§ *Epist. S. P. ad Hebr.*, 2.



that Juda has been chosen, from amongst his brethren, to be the root of the kings of Israel, and the father of that *Schilo* so long promised, who was to be the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The coming of Christ is pointed out in a precise manner: he shall arise from amid the ruins of his country, when the *schebet* (the sceptre; the legislative power) shall rest in the hand of strangers.*

The prophet saved from the waters, who was divinely called to gather and consign to writing the history of the first ages and the ancient traditions of mankind—traditions whose remembrance was still vivid amongst the nations—he fails not to lend the weight of his imposing testimony to the prophecy of Jacob. "A prophet," says he, speaking to the people of God, "shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me: him you shall hear according to all things, whatsoever he shall speak to you. And it shall be, that even some which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."†

Then it is of the Messiah that the synagogue has always under-

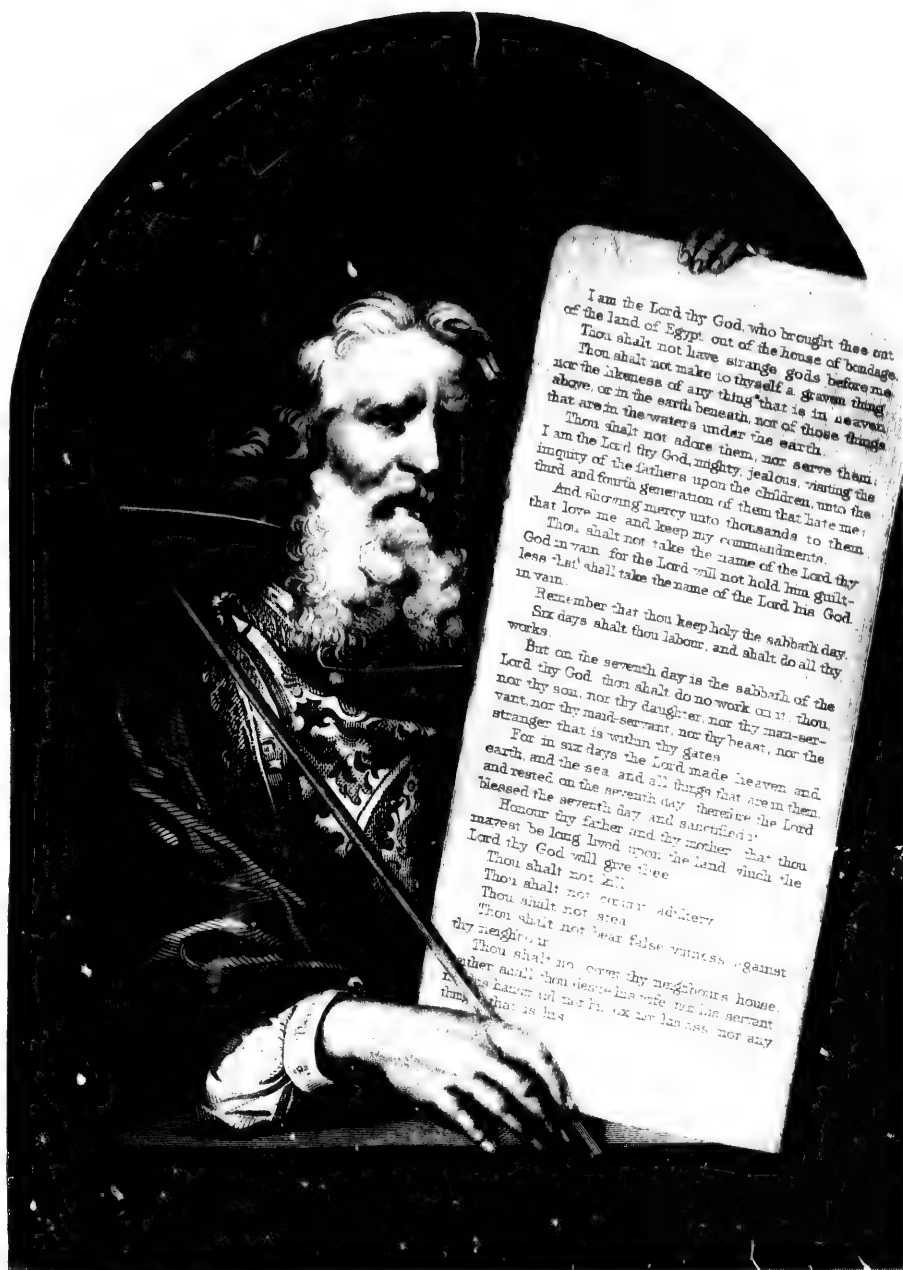
* The Christians apply this revelation of Jacob to the Messiah, and thereby prove to the Jews that he must have come long ago, seeing that for upwards of eighteen hundred years their tribes have been mixed up together; their sacrifice abolished, their government extinct; that they have no longer either territory or princes, and that, wherever they are found, they have to submit to the laws of foreign nations. To evade the force of this argument, the Jews now pretend that the word *schebet*, which we translate by *sceptre*, also signifies the rod which chastises the slave; and they take occasion from that to maintain that, even if this oracle did regard the Messiah, all that they could infer from it is, that their chastisement was to last till his coming, which was to be the signal of their delivery. Finally, they deny that the word *Schilo* can be translated by Messiah. But their old books give them the lie; this prophecy is understood of the Messiah in the Talmud; and here is how the Paraphrase of Onkelos expounds this passage: "Judas shall not be without a supreme ruler, nor without scribes of the sons of her children, till the Messiah come." Jonathan, to whom the Jews assign the first place amongst the disciples of Hillel, and whom they venerate almost as they do Moses, also translates *schebet* by principality, and *Schilo* by Messiah. The Paraphrase of Jerusalem is likewise on that side. Thus the most ancient Commentaries, the most authentic, and the most respected amongst the Jews, furnish weapons for their own defeat.

† Hence comes that hope of a new law which the Jews expect with the Messiah, a law which they place far above that of Moses. *The law which man studies in this world is but vanity, say their doctors, in comparison to that of the Messiah.* (Mo-drash-Rabba, in *Ecc.*, xi. 8.)



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I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out
of the land of Egypt out of the house of bondage.
Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.
Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing,
nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven
above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things
that are in the waters under the earth.

Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them.
I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous, visiting the
iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the
third and fourth generation of them that hate me.
And showing mercy unto thousands to them
that love me and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy
God in vain for the Lord will not hold him guilt-
less that shall take the name of the Lord his God
in vain.

Remember that thou keep holy the sabbath day.
Six days shalt thou labour, and shalt do all thy
works.

But on the seventh day is the sabbath of the
Lord thy God: thou shalt do no work on it, thou,
nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-ser-
vant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy man-ser-
stranger that is within thy gates.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and
earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them,
and rested on the seventh day: therefore the Lord
blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thou
mayest be long lived upon the land which the
Lord thy God will give thee.

Thou shalt not kill.
Thou shalt not commit adultery.
Thou shalt not steal.

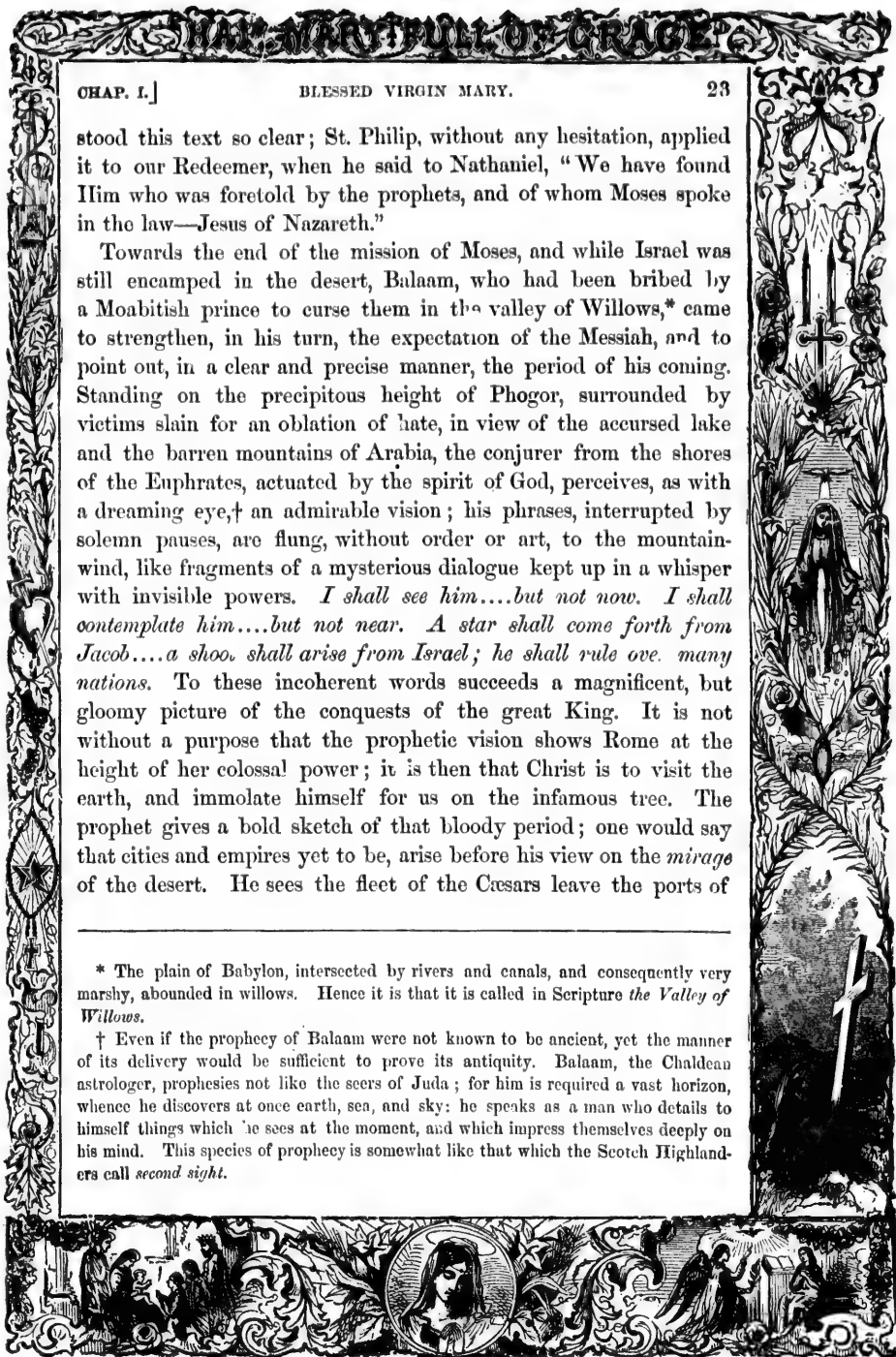
Thou shalt not bear false witness against
thy neighbour.
Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house,
his wife, his man-servant, his maid-servant,
his ox, his ass, his donkey, nor any
thing that is his.

stood this text so clear; St. Philip, without any hesitation, applied it to our Redeemer, when he said to Nathaniel, "We have found Him who was foretold by the prophets, and of whom Moses spoke in the law—Jesus of Nazareth."

Towards the end of the mission of Moses, and while Israel was still encamped in the desert, Balaam, who had been bribed by a Moabitish prince to curse them in the valley of Willows,* came to strengthen, in his turn, the expectation of the Messiah, and to point out, in a clear and precise manner, the period of his coming. Standing on the precipitous height of Phogor, surrounded by victims slain for an oblation of hate, in view of the accursed lake and the barren mountains of Arabia, the conjurer from the shores of the Euphrates, actuated by the spirit of God, perceives, as with a dreaming eye,† an admirable vision; his phrases, interrupted by solemn pauses, are flung, without order or art, to the mountain-wind, like fragments of a mysterious dialogue kept up in a whisper with invisible powers. *I shall see him....but not now. I shall contemplate him....but not near. A star shall come forth from Jacob....a shoot shall arise from Israel; he shall rule over many nations.* To these incoherent words succeeds a magnificent, but gloomy picture of the conquests of the great King. It is not without a purpose that the prophetic vision shows Rome at the height of her colossal power; it is then that Christ is to visit the earth, and immolate himself for us on the infamous tree. The prophet gives a bold sketch of that bloody period; one would say that cities and empires yet to be, arise before his view on the *mirage* of the desert. He sees the fleet of the Cæsars leave the ports of

* The plain of Babylon, intersected by rivers and canals, and consequently very marshy, abounded in willows. Hence it is that it is called in Scripture *the Valley of Willows*.

† Even if the prophecy of Balaam were not known to be ancient, yet the manner of its delivery would be sufficient to prove its antiquity. Balaam, the Chaldean astrologer, prophesies not like the seers of Juda; for him is required a vast horizon, whence he discovers at once earth, sea, and sky: he speaks as a man who details to himself things which he sees at the moment, and which impress themselves deeply on his mind. This species of prophecy is somewhat like that which the Scotch Highlanders call *second sight*.



Italy and direct their conquering prow towards the level coasts of the Syrians; he beholds the ruin of that Judea which was not yet in existence, and where the people of God then possessed only a few graves; finally, his eye marks the fall of the Roman eagle, seven hundred years before the birth of the sons of Ilia, and whilst the wild goats of Latium were still browsing in peace on the woody slopes of the seven hills.

Ages and ages then roll away without any further promise from JEHOVAH; but the prophecies are either confided to tradition, which faithfully preserves them, or else consigned to the sacred books Israel maintains an obscure, but ceaseless and infuriate struggle against the idolatrous nations which surround and press in upon its tribes; at times it gives way to the strange infatuation which attracts it to idolatry, and then the fatal sword of the Amorrian and the Moabite is unwittingly drawn on behalf of the Lord, and avenges, though undesignedly, the insult offered to the God of Jacob. But through all these vicissitudes, the people forget not the coming of Christ; they live in the faith of the Messiah; in default of new revelations, their very life becomes prophetic. Political and religious institutions, local customs and private habits, all tend to the same end, all flow from the same source; all is linked to the generation of the Saviour born of a virgin of Juda. It was the coming of the Messiah that was asked by the prophet Samuel, kneeling in the Holy of Holies, before the *Schekina*, his luminous and divine emblem, and by all the high-priests who succeeded him in the temple of Solomon. It was to the expectation of the Messiah that the law of Deuteronomy referred, which decreed that the brother should raise up an heir to his brother who died childless, to the end that his name might be perpetuated in Israel. It was the bighting of the hope of belonging one day, sooner or later, to the celestial ambassador, that drew tears from the eyes of that fair young virgin of Galaad, who sank but with that one sorrow into the bloody tomb which was to close on the last of her father's race.

* Some Rabbins pretend that the daughter of Jephtha was not sacrificed, but only condemned to perpetual celibacy. That assertion is nullified by the text of Scripture which says: *Let the daughters of Israel assemble once in the year to mourn four days*

It is to this belief, so general amongst the Hebrews, that the woman of Thecua has reference, when, denouncing to king David the secret intrigues which were warping the mind of the only son who remained to her, she signalizes her fears as a mother and a Jewish matron by the poetical complaint, "*My lord, they would extinguish my last spark!*"

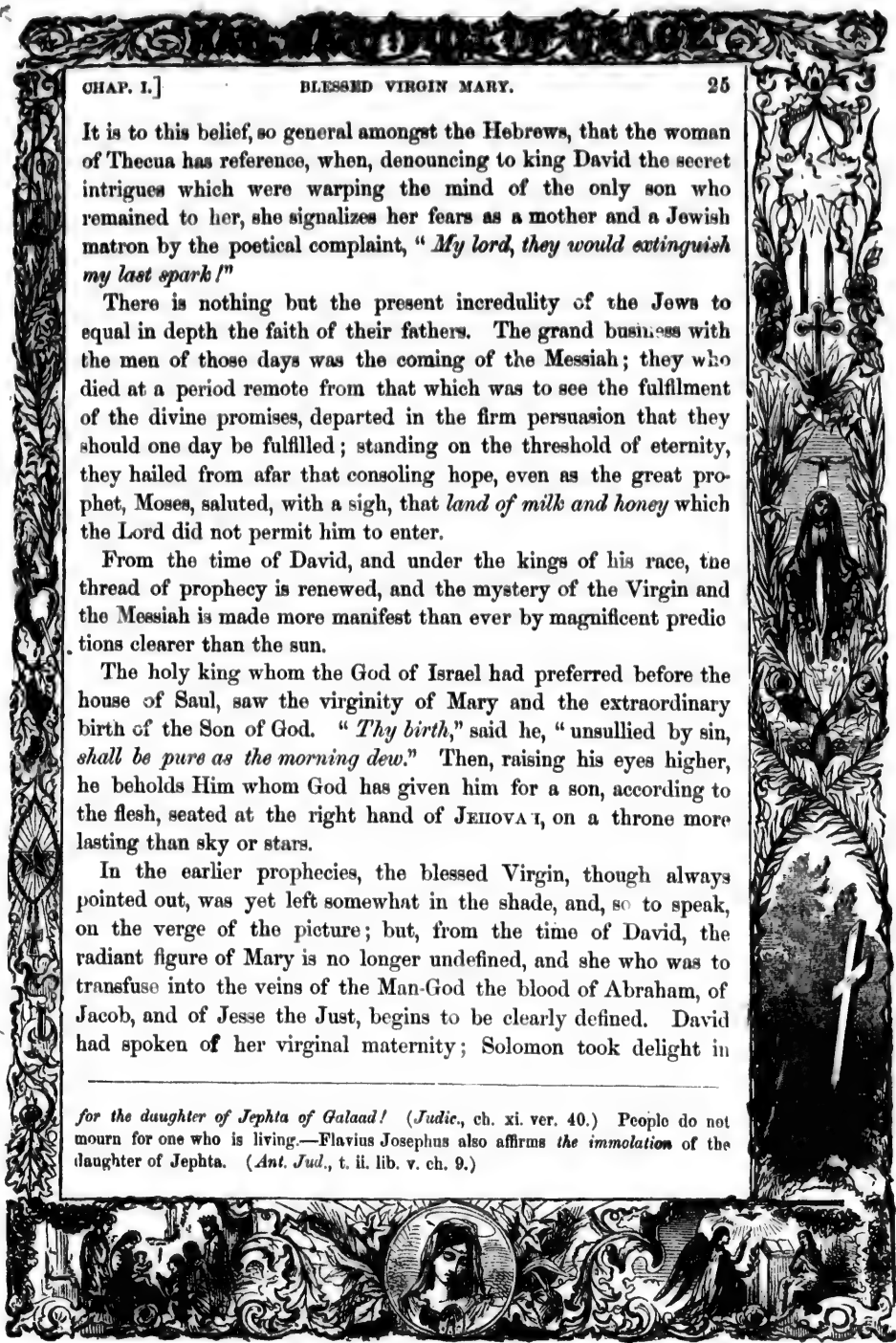
There is nothing but the present incredulity of the Jews to equal in depth the faith of their fathers. The grand business with the men of those days was the coming of the Messiah; they who died at a period remote from that which was to see the fulfilment of the divine promises, departed in the firm persuasion that they should one day be fulfilled; standing on the threshold of eternity, they hailed from afar that consoling hope, even as the great prophet, Moses, saluted, with a sigh, that *land of milk and honey* which the Lord did not permit him to enter.

From the time of David, and under the kings of his race, the thread of prophecy is renewed, and the mystery of the Virgin and the Messiah is made more manifest than ever by magnificent predictions clearer than the sun.

The holy king whom the God of Israel had preferred before the house of Saul, saw the virginity of Mary and the extraordinary birth of the Son of God. "*Thy birth,*" said he, "*unsullied by sin, shall be pure as the morning dew.*" Then, raising his eyes higher, he beholds Him whom God has given him for a son, according to the flesh, seated at the right hand of JEHOVAH, on a throne more lasting than sky or stars.

In the earlier prophecies, the blessed Virgin, though always pointed out, was yet left somewhat in the shade, and, so to speak, on the verge of the picture; but, from the time of David, the radiant figure of Mary is no longer undefined, and she who was to transfuse into the veins of the Man-God the blood of Abraham, of Jacob, and of Jesse the Just, begins to be clearly defined. David had spoken of her virginal maternity; Solomon took delight in

for the daughter of Jephtha of Galaad! (Judic., ch. xi. ver. 40.) People do not mourn for one who is living.—Flavius Josephus also affirms *the immolation* of the daughter of Jephtha. (Ant. Jud., t. ii. lib. v. ch. 9.)



tracing her image in colours so enchanting as to far outstrip the graceful descriptions of the Eastern Peris, those smiling and vapoury divinities which visit the dreams of Arabian shepherds. He sees her rise amid the daughters of Juda like a lily among thorns; her eyes are soft and mild as those of the dove; from her lips, red as a fillet of scarlet, comes a voice clear and melodious as the sound of the harp which inspires Israel in the battle; her step is ethereal as the breath of perfumes; and her beauty is radiant as that of the rising morn. Her tastes are simple and poetical; she loves to wander in the fresh valleys when the vines are in blossom and the figs hang like clusters of emeralds from the leafless branches; her looks seek out the red roses of the pomegranate, the tree of paradise,* and she hears with delight the plaintive song of the turtle. Silent and collected, she shrinks from every eye, and conceals herself within her dwelling like the dove which makes her nest in the clefts of the rock. She is chosen for a mystical marriage, preferably to all the virgins and queens of the nations; a crown is promised her by Him whom her soul loveth; and the blissful tie whereby she is united to her royal spouse is stronger than death.†

Elias, praying on Mount Carmel for the cessation of that long drought which, for three years, parched the earth and dried up every spring, discovers the promised virgin under the form of a transparent cloud arising from the bosom of the waters to announce the return of rain. The acclamations of the people salute this propitious omen,‡ and the prophet, who penetrates divine things, builds a chapel to the future Queen of Heaven.§ Isaiah declares

* In the East the pomegranate is called the fruit of paradise.

† It is agreed by all the holy Fathers that the *Canticle of Canticles* is but one continued allegory of the Mother of God.

‡ When rain falls in Palestine, there is a general rejoicing amongst the people; they assembled in the streets, sing, caper, and cry aloud, Oh God! oh Blessed! (Volney, *Voyage en Lybie*.)

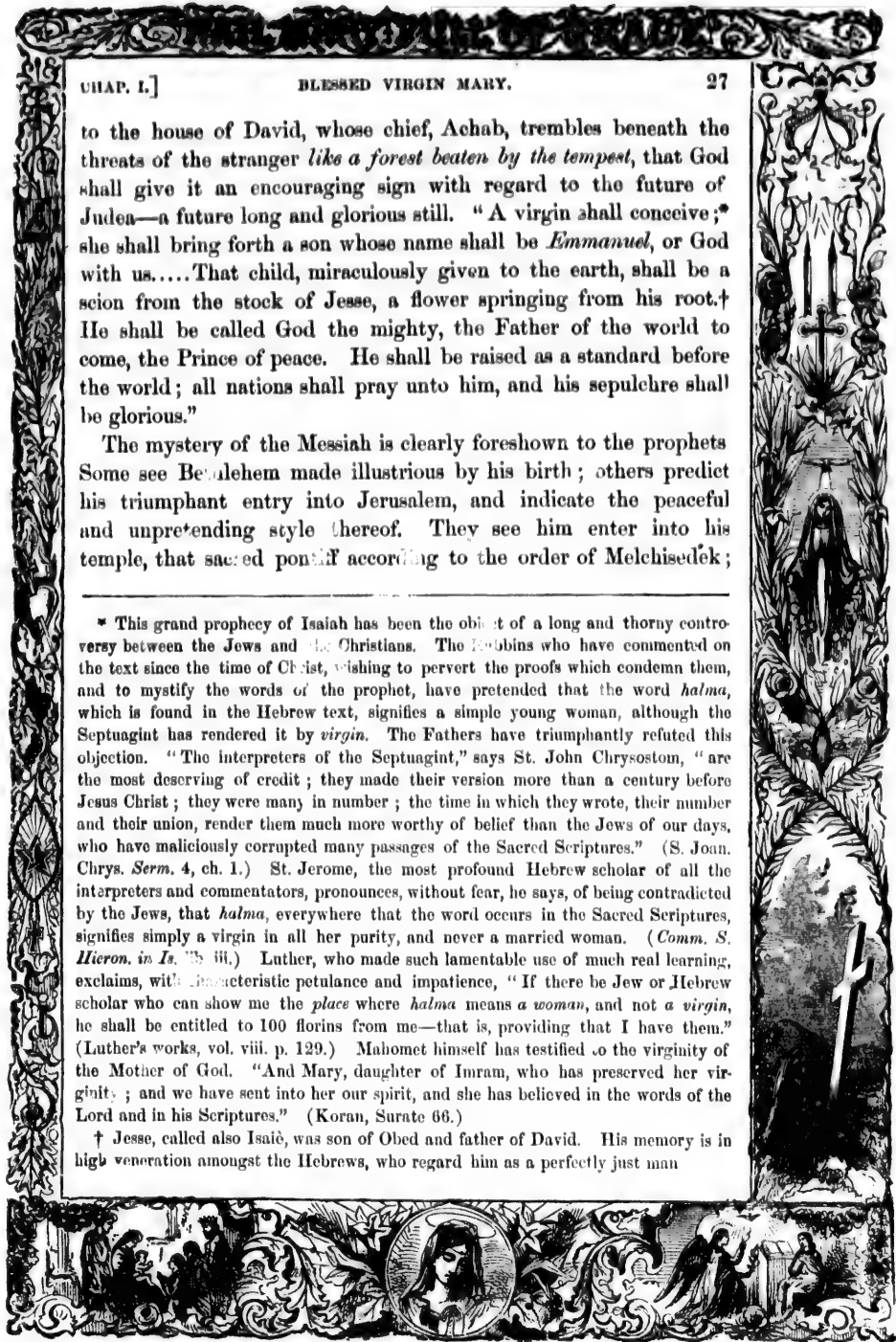
§ The chapel built by Elias on Mount Carmel was dedicated by him to the Virgin who was to bring forth, *Virgini pariturae*. This chapel was called *Semnaum*, which means a place consecrated to an *impérière* (empress), which can only refer to Mary, empress of heaven and earth. (*Histoire du Mont Carmel, succession du Saint Prophète*, ch. 31.)

to the house of David, whose chief, Achab, trembles beneath the threats of the stranger *like a forest beaten by the tempest*, that God shall give it an encouraging sign with regard to the future of Judea—a future long and glorious still. “A virgin shall conceive; * she shall bring forth a son whose name shall be *Emmanuel*, or God with us. That child, miraculously given to the earth, shall be a scion from the stock of Jesse, a flower springing from his root. † He shall be called God the mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace. He shall be raised as a standard before the world; all nations shall pray unto him, and his sepulchre shall be glorious.”

The mystery of the Messiah is clearly foreshown to the prophets. Some see Bethlehem made illustrious by his birth; others predict his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and indicate the peaceful and unpretending style thereof. They see him enter into his temple, that sacred pontiff according to the order of Melchisedek;

* This grand prophecy of Isaiah has been the object of a long and thorny controversy between the Jews and the Christians. The Rabbins who have commented on the text since the time of Christ, wishing to pervert the proofs which condemn them, and to mystify the words of the prophet, have pretended that the word *halma*, which is found in the Hebrew text, signifies a simple young woman, although the Septuagint has rendered it by *virgin*. The Fathers have triumphantly refuted this objection. “The interpreters of the Septuagint,” says St. John Chrysostom, “are the most deserving of credit; they made their version more than a century before Jesus Christ; they were many in number; the time in which they wrote, their number and their union, render them much more worthy of belief than the Jews of our days, who have maliciously corrupted many passages of the Sacred Scriptures.” (S. Joan. Chrys. *Serm.* 4, ch. 1.) St. Jerome, the most profound Hebrew scholar of all the interpreters and commentators, pronounces, without fear, he says, of being contradicted by the Jews, that *halma*, everywhere that the word occurs in the Sacred Scriptures, signifies simply a virgin in all her purity, and never a married woman. (*Comm. S. Hieron. in Is.* lib. III.) Luther, who made such lamentable use of much real learning, exclaims, with characteristic petulance and impatience, “If there be Jew or Hebrew scholar who can show me the *place* where *halma* means a woman, and not a virgin, he shall be entitled to 100 florins from me—that is, providing that I have them.” (Luther’s works, vol. viii. p. 129.) Mahomet himself has testified to the virginity of the Mother of God. “And Mary, daughter of Imram, who has preserved her virginity; and we have sent into her our spirit, and she has believed in the words of the Lord and in his Scriptures.” (Koran, Surate 66.)

† Jesse, called also Isaïe, was son of Obed and father of David. His memory is in high veneration amongst the Hebrews, who regard him as a perfectly just man



they know the number of the pieces of silver which the persecuting rulers of the Synagogue shall drop into the hands of the wretch who is to sell his Master;* they see the ignominious execution, the draught of vinegar and gall offered in insolent mockery during the agony of a God, and the garment, woven by the hands of a mother, disposed of by lot amongst the rude soldiers; they hear the sound of the nails which rend the bleeding hands, and sink with a dry, crackling sound into the accursed wood. And then the scene changes, like those paintings of Raphael where the subject, begun on earth, extends itself beyond the clouds. The man of sorrows, the humble Messiah, whom even his own kindred despised, whom his people have not known, looks down in triumph from the highest heavens on his prostrate enemies; and the nations of the earth are all at length mindful of their God, forgotten for so many ages! The nations rally round the standard of the cross, and the empire of Christ shall have no bounds but those of the universe. Nothing is wanting to complete the prophecies. Jacob pointed out the coming of *Schilo* at the precise moment when the Jews shall cease to be governed by their own laws, which involves, of course, the ruin of a state; Balaam adds that that destruction shall be effected by a people from Italy, and the satrap Daniel counts exactly the weeks which are to elapse before the appointed time.

"Every thing that happens in this world has its preceding sign," said a man of genius, who is now lonely and dreaded under his tent. "When the sun is about to rise, the horizon is coloured with a thousand hues, and the East appears all on fire. When the tempest is coming, there is heard on the shore a rumbling noise, and the waves are agitated, as it were, of themselves." The figures of the Old Testament, according to the Fathers of the Church, are the signs which announce the rising of the *Sun of Justice* and of the *Star of the Sea*. To Christ, the Son of God, belongs strength and power;

* This passage, wherein God himself declares the number of silver pieces given in that infamous bargain, is impressed with a bitter and a dreadful irony. "And the Lord said to me: Cast it to the statuary, a handsome price, that I was priced at by them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver," &c. (*Zach. xi. 13.*)

to Mary, grace and pitying kindness. She is the tree of life planted in the abodes of men by the hands of God himself, and the pledge of happiness far beyond that which our first parents enjoyed in Eden; the dove from the ark, bearing to earth the olive branch; the sealed fountain whose waters have never been troubled with aught of impurity; the fleece which receives the dew of heaven; finally, the delicate and odoriferous rose-bush through which Moses perceived the Divinity—a bush which, very far from being consumed by the fire, which destroys all things else, was in some sort preserved thereby, and lost, in its contact with the celestial flame, neither a leaf nor a flower.*

Like that enchanting figure which an ancient painter composed by borrowing a thousand detached beauties from the loveliest women of Greece, so the chaste spouse of the Holy Ghost united, in her own person, all that had been most admirable in the celebrated women of the old law. Fair as Rachel and Sarah, she united to the prudence of Abigail the heroic courage of Esther; Susannah, chaste as the flower whose name she bears;† Judith, whose crown of lilies was sprinkled with the blood of Holofernes;‡ Axa, whose hand was the ransom of a conquered city; and that mother, so illustrious in her misfortunes, who beheld all her sons die for the law; these were but faint images of Her who was to unite within herself all the perfections of the woman and the angel.

After an expectation of four thousand years, the time marked out by so many prophecies at length arrives; the shadows of the ancient law disappear, and Mary arises on the horizon of Judea like the star which heralds the approach of day.

* Philo, who has made this remark, and who discovers in this burning bush a mysterious allegory, falsely applies it to the Jewish nation by a forced conjunction. Josephus, who also tried to penetrate this mystery, has succeeded no better. Those wild roses, emblematical of modest maidens who shed their sweet perfume in solitude, and who are made resplendent by contact with the Deity, without having their spotless white and delicate blush anywise tainted thereby, these are the most striking image of Mary, that mystical rose of the new law.

† The name Susannah signifies *lily*. (Faby. ii. 2.)

‡ The ancients attribute to the lily the power of nullifying enchantments and warding off danger. "Judith encircled her brows," say the Rabbins, "with a garland of lilies, so as to make her way without fear into the tent of Holofernes." (Comm R. R. in *Judith*.)

CHAPTER II.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

A WOMAN destined from all eternity to save the world by deifying our nature, and to bear in her chaste womb Him *whose tent is the sun, and whose steps are over the highest heavens*; a woman expected from the beginning of the world, revealed by God even in Paradise, and the acknowledged end of all the holy generations who succeeded each other from the days of the patriarchs;* she can be no ordinary creature, and must needs have superhuman prerogatives. The pious belief of the immaculate conception of Mary is the result of that sentiment of respect. Heirs of an unfortunate parent, degraded by our rebellious father, blighted by the sentence which condemns him, so far from receiving from him the life of grace, we have received from him the death of sin, and, by a fearful doom, are condemned even before our birth. This misfortune, inherent in the human race, accursed as one man in its very origin, is common to all, and the Scripture makes no exception in favour of any son of Adam. But the piety of the faithful cannot bear the idea that the Mother of God should be submitted to the scathing condemnation whereby we are stamped with the seal of hell even in our mother's womb; they have believed that the Sovereign Judge must have suspended the general effect of his rigorous law in favour of her who was brought into the world only to contribute to the accomplishment of the most secret, the most incomprehensible of the decrees of God—the Incarnation of the Messiah. Notwithstanding the silence of the Gospel, it has, therefore, been generally supposed that the Virgin, in anticipation of her divine maternity, has been

* According to St. Augustine, the issue to which all the patriarchs aspired was Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ in Mary, through whom alone they could expect him. "And in fact," says he, "if nature, in all her efforts, tends to Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of Ages, it is not that she flatters herself that she can reach the Son of God by herself; the extent of her power stops at the humble Mary, who was to engender the blessed seed, not by virtue of her ancestors, but by that of the Most High." (St. Augustine, 5, *Contr. Jul.* 9.)



restrained, so to speak, on the verge of the dread abyss hollowed under our feet by the fatal disobedience of our first parents, and that her conception is immaculate as her life.

This belief, which the Greeks borrowed from Palestine, and adopted with enthusiasm,* gave rise to the institution of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which was celebrated with great pomp in Constantinople, from the sixth century.† In the West, on the contrary, this doctrine met opponents, and powerful opponents; for St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas d'Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, and many other pious and learned doctors, all great theologians, and, moreover, devoted to the service of Mary, have maintained that she was conceived in sin and subjected to the common law,‡ although she was very soon entirely purified therefrom by a special and excellent grace which commenced her glorious state of Mother of God.

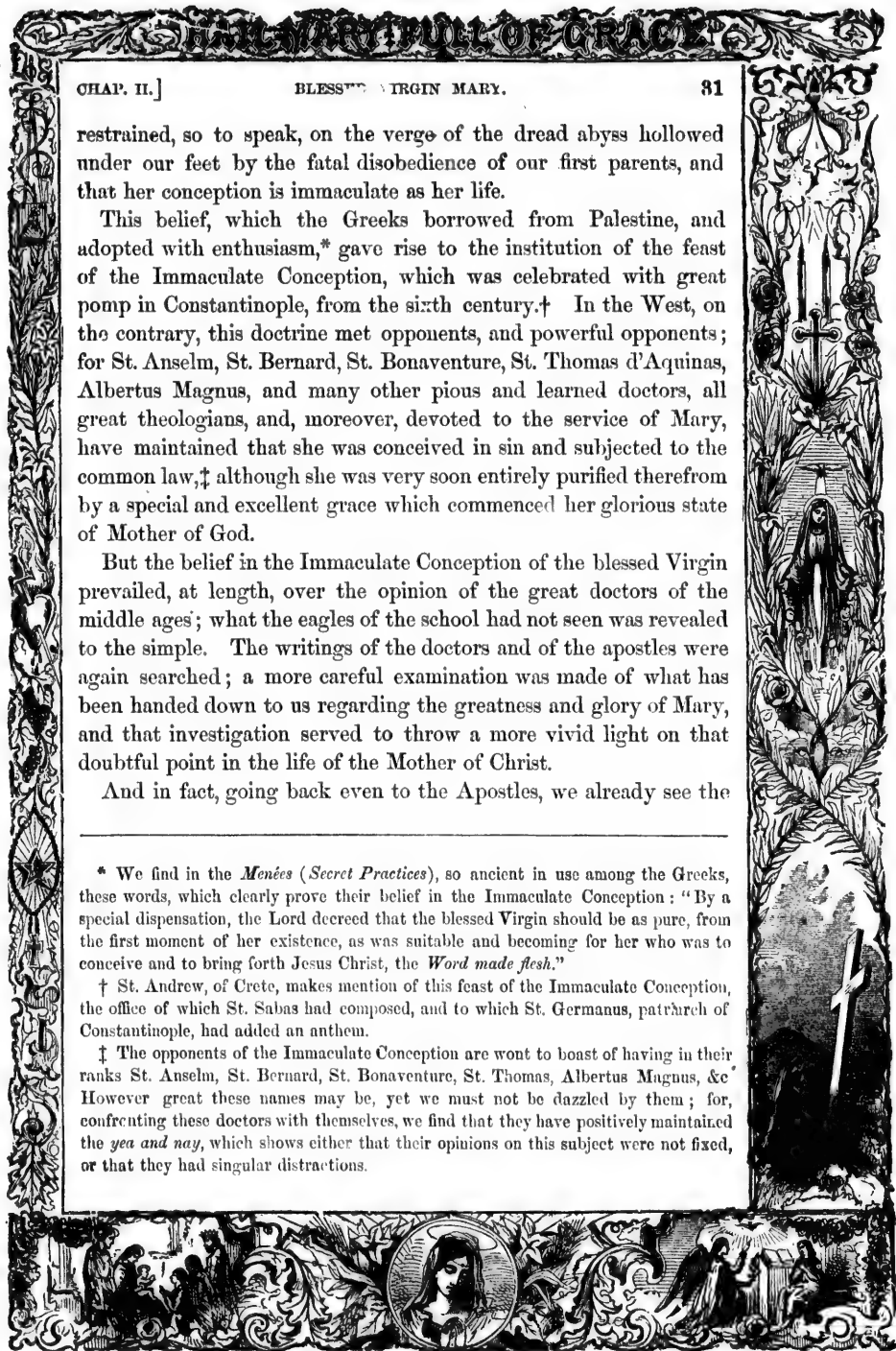
But the belief in the Immaculate Conception of the blessed Virgin prevailed, at length, over the opinion of the great doctors of the middle ages; what the eagles of the school had not seen was revealed to the simple. The writings of the doctors and of the apostles were again searched; a more careful examination was made of what has been handed down to us regarding the greatness and glory of Mary, and that investigation served to throw a more vivid light on that doubtful point in the life of the Mother of Christ.

And in fact, going back even to the Apostles, we already see the

* We find in the *Menées* (*Secret Practices*), so ancient in use among the Greeks, these words, which clearly prove their belief in the Immaculate Conception: "By a special dispensation, the Lord decreed that the blessed Virgin should be as pure, from the first moment of her existence, as was suitable and becoming for her who was to conceive and to bring forth Jesus Christ, the *Word made flesh*."

† St. Andrew, of Crete, makes mention of this feast of the Immaculate Conception, the office of which St. Sabas had composed, and to which St. Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople, had added an anthem.

‡ The opponents of the Immaculate Conception are wont to boast of having in their ranks St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas, Albertus Magnus, &c. However great these names may be, yet we must not be dazzled by them; for, confronting these doctors with themselves, we find that they have positively maintained the *yea and nay*, which shows either that their opinions on this subject were not fixed, or that they had singular distractions.



title of *blessed* and *immaculate* applied to Mary.* The apostle St Andrew, quoted by the Babylonian Abdias, expresses himself in these terms: "Even as the first Adam was made of the earth before it was cursed, so was the second Adam formed of a pure virgin who was never under the ban."

The saints and martyrs who lived in the third century, St. Hippolytus, martyr,† Origen,‡ St. Denis of Alexandria,§ all give to the blessed Virgin the qualification of *pure* and *immaculate*. St. Cyprian|| is more precise, and says clearly that "there is a great difference between the rest of mortals and the Virgin, and that she has nothing in common with them but nature,—not sin."

In the fourth century, St. Ambrose, who compares the Virgin "to a bright and luminous stem, whereon has never been either the knot of original sin or the bark of actual sin;"¶ St. John Chrysostom,** who proclaims her most holy, *immaculate*, blessed above all creatures; St. Jerome,†† who poetically calls her the day-cloud which never knew darkness; St. Basil,‡‡ whom the defenders of the Immaculate Conception are proud to regard as their leader; these have never varied regarding that stainless purity which so well becomes the Queen of Angels.

In the fifth century, St. Augustine§§ cannot endure to have the name of Mary mentioned when there is question of sin, and St. Peter Chrysologus||| affirms that "in the Virgin all were saved."

* St. James the Major, and St. Mark, in their Liturgies.

† S. Hipp. in an oration on the *Consummation of the World*.

‡ Orig. *hom. in S. Matth.*

§ S. Den. in an epistle given in the *Biblioth. des PP.*

|| S. Cypr., *de Nat. Virg.*

¶ "Virgo in qua nec nodus originalis, nec cortex actualis culpæ fuit." S. Ambr. *de Inst. Virg.*, ch. 5.

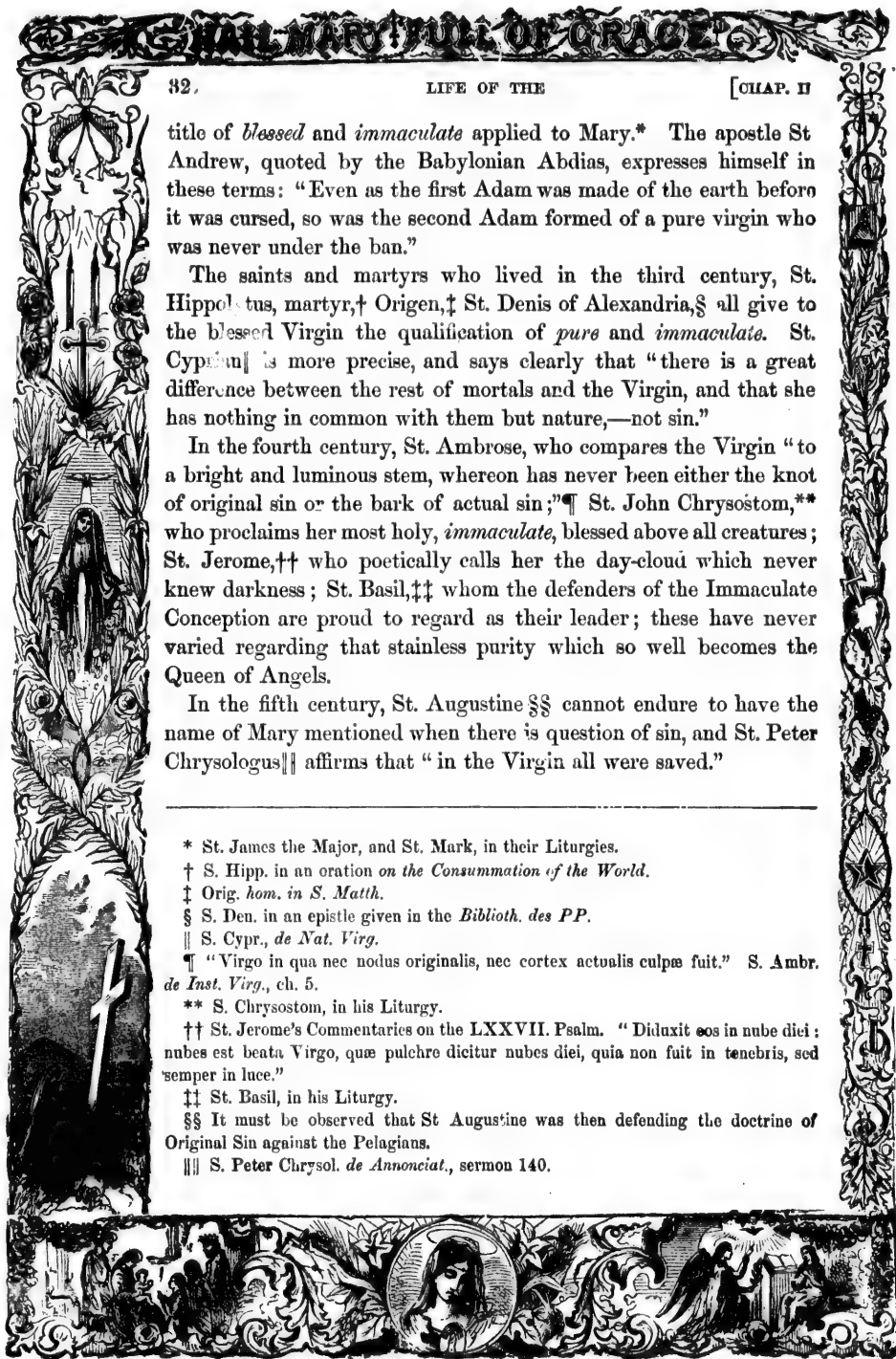
** S. Chrysostom, in his Liturgy.

†† St. Jerome's Commentaries on the LXXVII. Psalm. "Diduxit eos in nube diei: nubes est beata Virgo, quæ pulchre dicitur nubes diei, quia non fuit in tenebris, sed semper in luce."

‡‡ St. Basil, in his Liturgy.

§§ It must be observed that St. Augustine was then defending the doctrine of Original Sin against the Pelagians.

||| S. Peter Chrysol. *de Annonciat.*, sermon 140.



St. Fulgentius, who lived in the beginning of the sixth century, says, that "the blessed Virgin was entirely excluded from the first de ree."* "It is very wrong," says St. Ildefonsus,† archbishop of Toledo, who flourished in the same century, "It is very wrong to think of subjecting the Mother of God to the laws of nature; it is constant that she was free and exempt from all original sin, and that she has removed the curse of Eve." St. John Damascene,‡ speaking expressly of her conception, says that she was "pure and *immaculate*." In the ninth century, Theophanes, Abbot of Grandchamp; in the tenth, St. Fulbert, bishop of Chartres; towards the middle of the eleventh, Yves of Chartres,§ one of the most brilliant lights of that period, and a little later, St. Bruno,|| founder of the Carthusians, are evidently in favour of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin.

Islamism itself, declares for the Immaculate Conception, and the Arab commentators on the Koran have adopted, in their own way, the opinion of the Catholic theologians who have pronounced in favour of that doctrine. "Every descendant of Adam," says Cottada, "from the moment that he comes into the world, is touched on the side by Satan; Jesus and Mary are alone excepted; for God interposed between them and Satan a veil which preserved them from his fatal touch."

These testimonies in favour of the Immaculate Conception become weaker and less abundant in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; few writers of any note then took this view of the subject, and several men of eminent piety and learning maintained the contrary

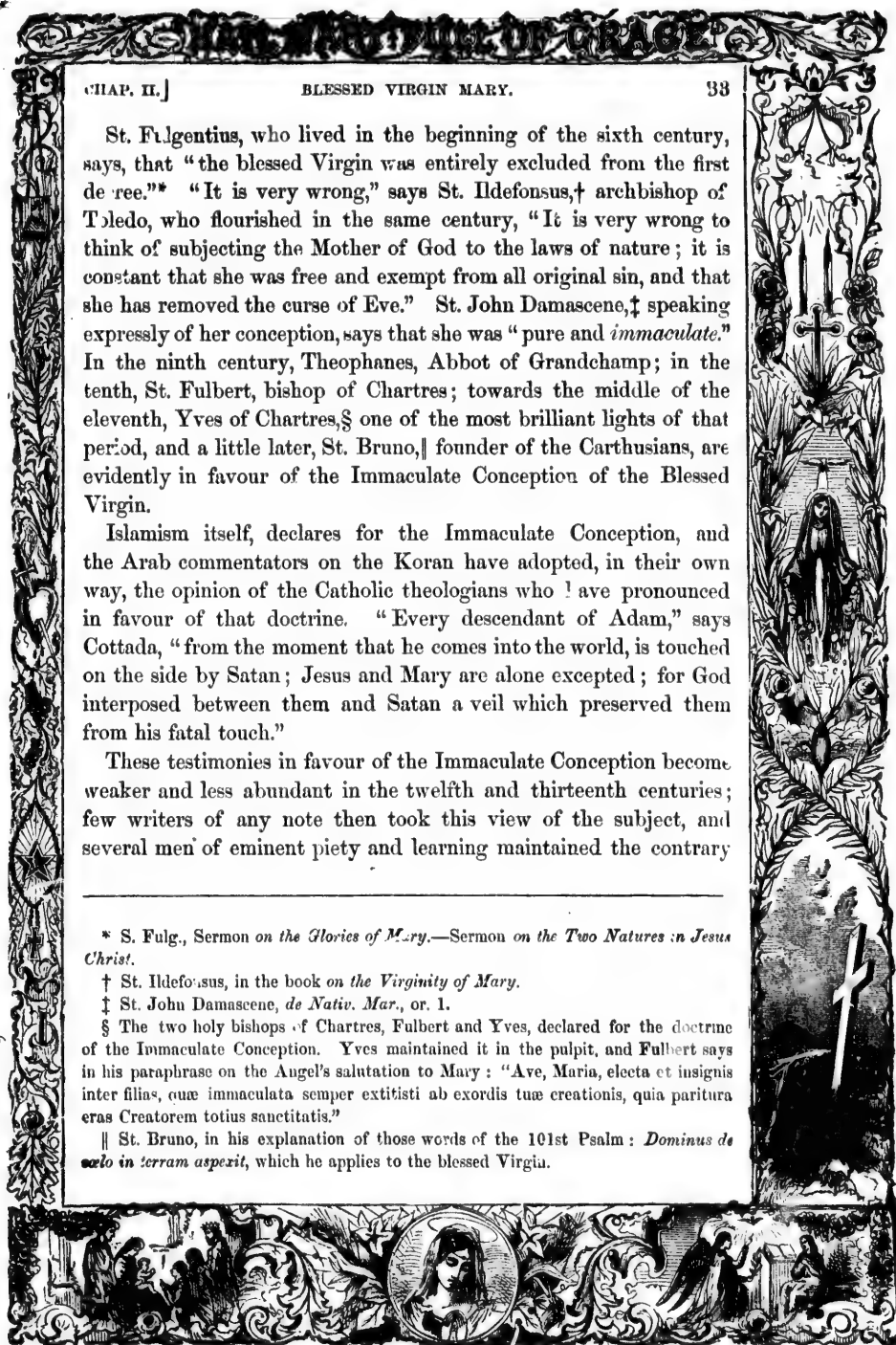
* S. Fulg., Sermon on the Glories of *Mary*.—Sermon on the Two Natures in Jesus Christ.

† St. Ildefonsus, in the book on the *Virginity of Mary*.

‡ St. John Damascene, *de Nativ. Mar.*, or. 1.

§ The two holy bishops of Chartres, Fulbert and Yves, declared for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Yves maintained it in the pulpit, and Fulbert says in his paraphrase on the Angel's salutation to Mary: "Ave, Maria, electa et insignis inter filias, quæ immaculata semper extitisti ab exordis tuæ creationis, quia paritura eras Creatorem totius sanctitatis."

|| St. Bruno, in his explanation of those words of the 101st Psalm: *Dominus de caelo in terram asperxit*, which he applies to the blessed Virgins.





opinion. In compensation the feast of the Conception of the Virgin was established in many kingdoms.

William the Conqueror established this festival in Normandy as early as the year 1074; and, from the reign of his son, Henry the First, King of England and Duke of Normandy, it was celebrated at Rouen with extraordinary solemnity. "It was instituted," say the ancient chroniclers, "because of the holy apparition seen by an ecclesiastic worthy of credit, who found himself exposed to the perils of the sea during a storm." An old history of the antiquities of Rouen, adds that "even at the time of the institution of the feast, there was founded an association of the most notable persons of the city, who still annually elect one of their number to be prince of the confraternity, who holding the *puy* (or stage) open to all orators, in every language, gives excellent and valuable prizes to those who shall best and most faithfully celebrate the praises of the Virgin Mary, in her holy conception, by hymns, odes, sonnets, ballads, royal songs, &c."*

Thus the Virgin full of grace presided at the revival of poetry, and her Immaculate Conception furnished pious themes to the land of minstrels.

From Normandy, the feast of the Conception passed over to the English. The first council of Oxford, held by Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, in the year 1222, placed it in the number of holidays to be observed. In France, in the year 1288, a bishop of Paris, Renoul de Hombière, bequeathed a considerable sum to found the office of that feast of the blessed Virgin, which was about the same time introduced into the Lyonnais. Finally, a manuscript martyrology of the thirteenth century, found in the library of the Dominicans of Dijon, fixes the festival of the Conception of our Lady on the 8th of December: "which also shows," say the learned Benedictines who deciphered that ancient manuscript, "that in St. Dominick's time, this feast was already celebrated in nearly all the Church."

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception had been banished

* *Antiquités et Singularités de la Ville de Rouen.* By N. Tailliepié, Doctor of Theology.



from pulpits and from schools for a very long period of time, when some theologians, perceiving that this belief ascended back to the highest and purest sources of Christianity, undertook to revive it. The Franciscans, who first began to make a public profession of it, in speaking,* and in writing, supported it by reasons so strong and so convincing, that not only the mass of the faithful, but the most learned body in Europe, clung to it with enthusiasm. The Sorbonne, which was then called *the firmament of science, the prop of truth and piety in the church of God*, decreed that all those who should be promoted to the degree of doctor were to engage themselves by oath to maintain this pious belief.† So, in succession, did the universities of Mayence, of Cologne, of Valentia, of Alcalá, of Coïmbra, of Salamanca, and of Naples.

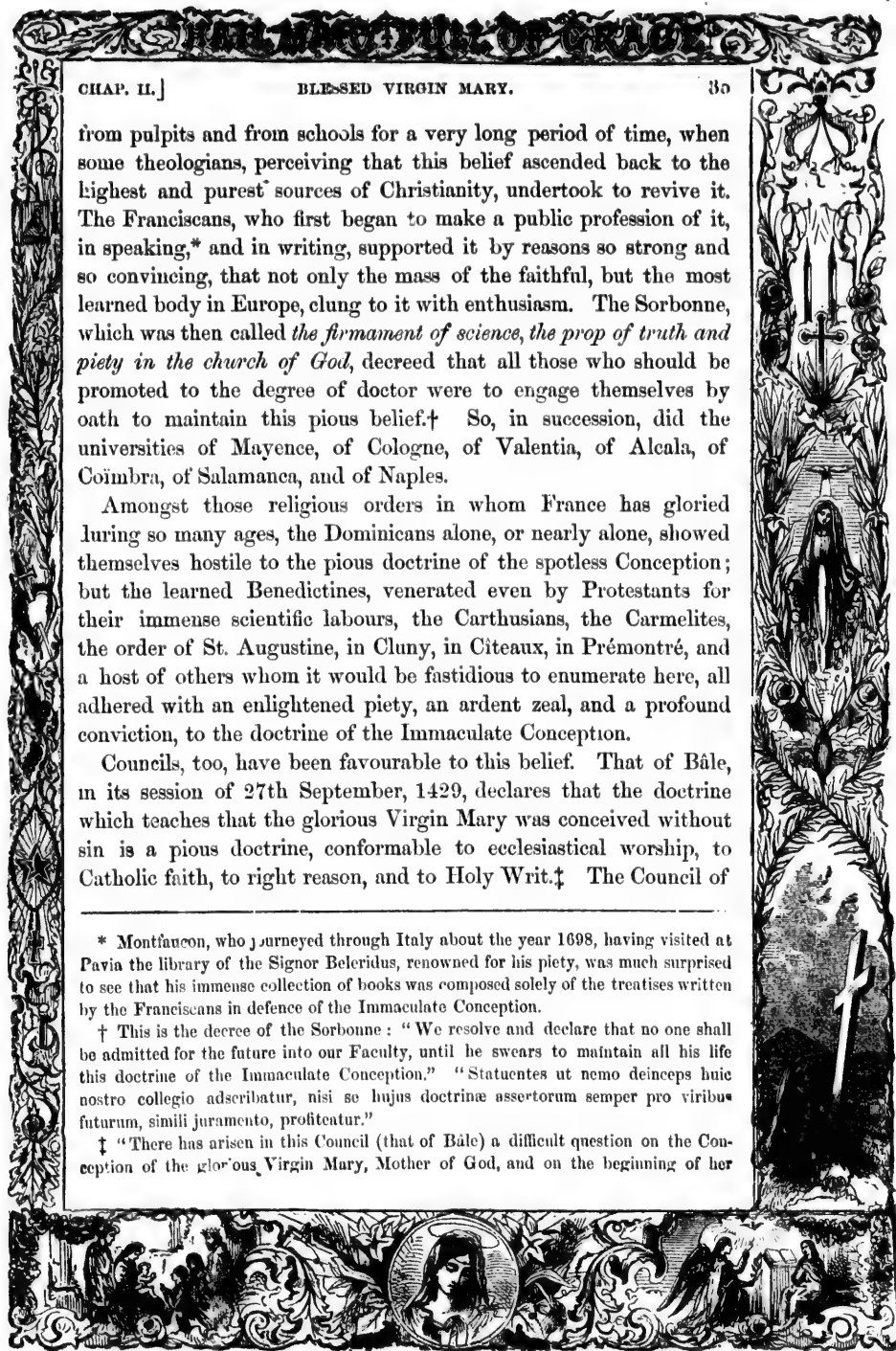
Amongst those religious orders in whom France has gloried during so many ages, the Dominicans alone, or nearly alone, showed themselves hostile to the pious doctrine of the spotless Conception; but the learned Benedictines, venerated even by Protestants for their immense scientific labours, the Carthusians, the Carmelites, the order of St. Augustine, in Cluny, in Cîteaux, in Prémontré, and a host of others whom it would be fastidious to enumerate here, all adhered with an enlightened piety, an ardent zeal, and a profound conviction, to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Councils, too, have been favourable to this belief. That of Bâle, in its session of 27th September, 1429, declares that the doctrine which teaches that the glorious Virgin Mary was conceived without sin is a pious doctrine, conformable to ecclesiastical worship, to Catholic faith, to right reason, and to Holy Writ.‡ The Council of

* Montfaucon, who journeyed through Italy about the year 1698, having visited at Pavia the library of the Signor Beleridus, renowned for his piety, was much surprised to see that his immense collection of books was composed solely of the treatises written by the Franciscans in defence of the Immaculate Conception.

† This is the decree of the Sorbonne: "We resolve and declare that no one shall be admitted for the future into our Faculty, until he swears to maintain all his life this doctrine of the Immaculate Conception." "Statuentes ut nemo deinceps huic nostro collegio adscribatur, nisi se hujus doctrinæ assertorum semper pro viribus futurum, simili juramento, profiteatur."

‡ "There has arisen in this Council (that of Bâle) a difficult question on the Conception of the glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and on the beginning of her



Avignon confirmed, in 1457, the decree of the Council of Bâle, and in their session of 1564,* the Fathers of the Council of Trent declared that, in their decree of 1546, on original sin, they did not pretend to include the blessed and *immaculate* Mother of God.

Notwithstanding the prudent reserve maintained by the Holy See in an affair wherein figured, for and against, famous doctors and illustrious theologians, it yet could not help showing, at times, which party had its sympathy. In the year 1483, Pope Sixtus IV. had expressly forbidden that the subject of the Conception of Our Lady† should be discussed in pulpits or in schools. This might be taken for a mere act of neutrality, had not this pontiff approved of the Office of the Conception composed by a monk of Verona, and granted

sanctification ; some saying that her soul was, for some time, or at least for some moments, subjected to the fact of original sin ; others maintaining, on the contrary, that the love of God for her extended even to the first instant of her creation : that the Most High, who created her, and the Son who formed her to be his mother on earth, have endowed her with singular and extraordinary graces ; that Jesus Christ has redeemed her in a superior and particular manner, preserving her from the original stain, and sanctifying her in the very first moment of her conception.

"Having, therefore, carefully examined the reasons and the authorities which, for several years, have been brought forward, on both sides, in the public acts of this holy Council ; having, moreover, given our attention to many other things on the same subject ; all weighed and maturely considered, we decide and declare that the doctrine which teaches that the glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God, by a special favour, and by a preverting and operating grace, has never been actually subjected to original sin, but that she has ever been holy, immaculate and exempt from all sin, original and actual ; we declare that the doctrine which teaches all that, is a pious doctrine, conformable to ecclesiastical worship, to Catholic faith, to right reason, and to Holy Writ, and that, as such, it is to be approved, held, and followed by all Catholics, so that no one shall be hereafter permitted to preach or teach the contrary. Renewing, besides the institution of the feast of the holy Conception, which, by an ancient and praiseworthy custom, is solemnized on the 8th day of December, at Rome, as in all the other churches, we will and ordain that this festival be celebrated on the day before mentioned, under the name of the Conception of the Virgin, in all the churches, monasteries, and communities of the Catholic religion, and that it be observed with all manner of praise and gladness, and canticles of joy." The Council even attaches indulgences to this solemnity.

* "Declarat hæc sancta synodus non esse intentionis sue comprehendere in hoc decreto, ubi de peccato originali agitur, beatam et IMMACULATAM Dei Genitricem." (Conc. Trid. sess. 1564.)

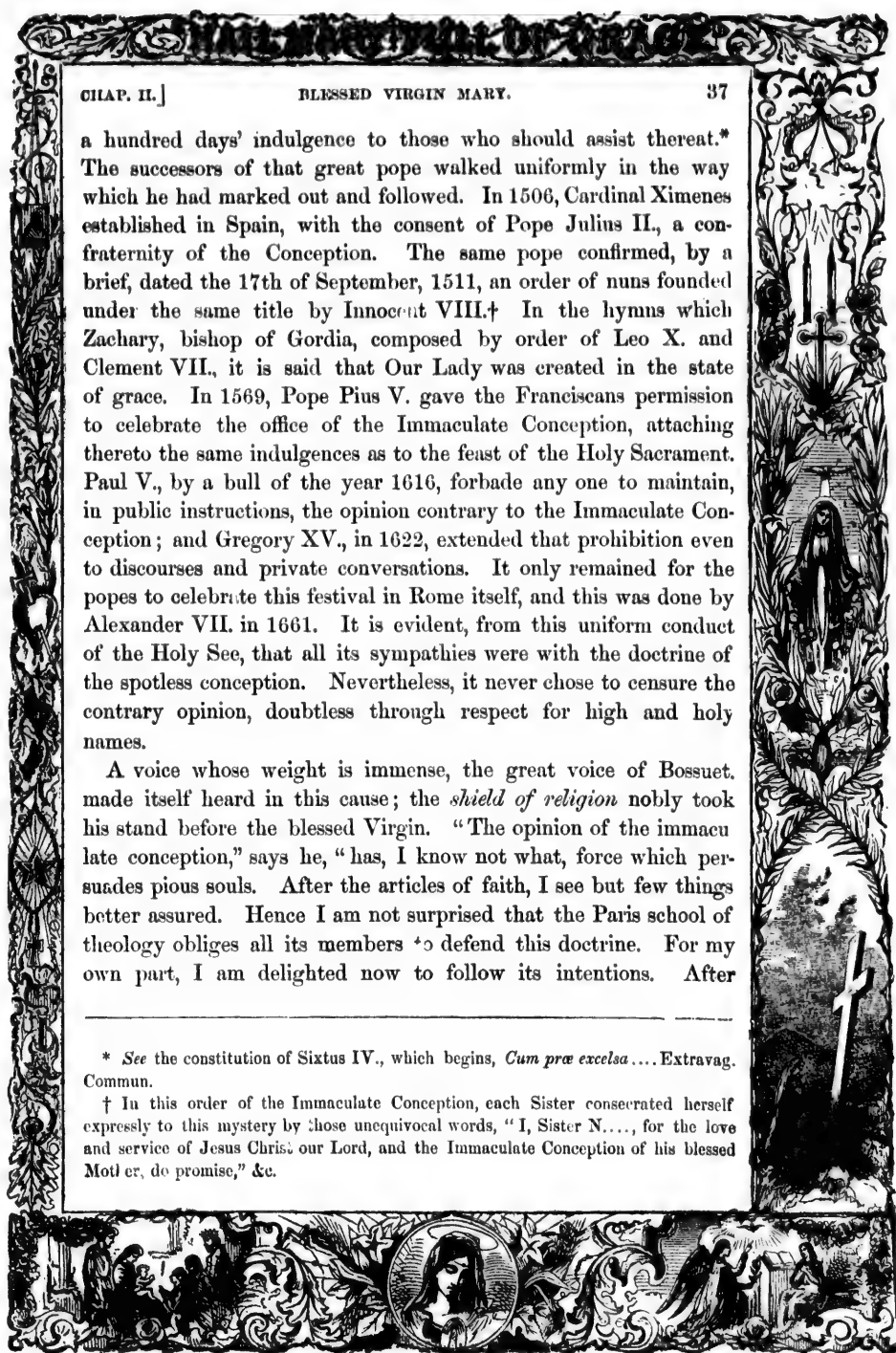
† See the constitution of Sixtus IV., which commences with *Grave nimis*.

a hundred days' indulgence to those who should assist thereat.* The successors of that great pope walked uniformly in the way which he had marked out and followed. In 1506, Cardinal Ximenes established in Spain, with the consent of Pope Julius II., a confraternity of the Conception. The same pope confirmed, by a brief, dated the 17th of September, 1511, an order of nuns founded under the same title by Innocent VIII.† In the hymns which Zachary, bishop of Gordia, composed by order of Leo X. and Clement VII., it is said that Our Lady was created in the state of grace. In 1569, Pope Pius V. gave the Franciscans permission to celebrate the office of the Immaculate Conception, attaching thereto the same indulgences as to the feast of the Holy Sacrament. Paul V., by a bull of the year 1616, forbade any one to maintain, in public instructions, the opinion contrary to the Immaculate Conception; and Gregory XV., in 1622, extended that prohibition even to discourses and private conversations. It only remained for the popes to celebrate this festival in Rome itself, and this was done by Alexander VII. in 1661. It is evident, from this uniform conduct of the Holy See, that all its sympathies were with the doctrine of the spotless conception. Nevertheless, it never chose to censure the contrary opinion, doubtless through respect for high and holy names.

A voice whose weight is immense, the great voice of Bossuet, made itself heard in this cause; the *shield of religion* nobly took his stand before the blessed Virgin. "The opinion of the immaculate conception," says he, "has, I know not what, force which persuades pious souls. After the articles of faith, I see but few things better assured. Hence I am not surprised that the Paris school of theology obliges all its members *o defend this doctrine. For my own part, I am delighted now to follow its intentions. After

* See the constitution of Sixtus IV., which begins, *Cum præ excelsa*.... Extravag. Commun.

† In this order of the Immaculate Conception, each Sister consecrated herself expressly to this mystery by those unequivocal words, "I, Sister N...., for the love and service of Jesus Christ our Lord, and the Immaculate Conception of his blessed Mother, do promise," &c.



having been nursed on its milk, I willingly submit to its ordinance, the more so as this seems to me to be also the will of the Church; she has a very great veneration for the conception of Mary; she does not, it is true, oblige us to believe it *immaculate*; but she makes us understand that that belief is very pleasing to her. There are things which she commands, and by them we manifest our obedience; there are others which she insinuates, and by them we may testify our affection. It is for our piety, if we are true children of the Church, not only to obey the commandments, but to bow to the slightest indications of the will of a mother so good and so holy."^{*}

It is certain that the devotion to the blessed Virgin has been common in Western Europe from the mediæval times; and, since then, it has made an immense progress; but, without meaning to disparage France and Italy, those two nations so eminently devoted to the Virgin, it must be acknowledged that it is Spain which has laboured the most zealously and ardently for the propagation of that doctrine.

The Spanish Church, protesting against the pretensions of the Church of Normandy, which attributes to itself the institution of the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady in the West, will have it that it has been observed in Spain ever since the seventh century.† It is certain that, in 1394, Don Juan I. of Arragon, who instituted it, in the name of the king, in the several provinces of Spain which had shaken off the yoke of Islamism, affirms that a great number of his predecessors had celebrated this festival before him.‡ We shall not decide between the two

* Bossuet, *Sermon on the Conception*.

† "La Iglesia española fué la primera que celebró la Inmaculada Concepcion de santísima Virgen; cuya fiesta tuvo lugar en ella desde el siglo séptimo." (El maestro Villados, en el cap. de los Festiv. Eccles., t. i., part ii.)

‡ This is the decree of Don Juan I. of Arragon: "We, Don Juan, by the grace of God, King of Arragon and Valencia, &c. Why is it that some persons are amazed to hear that the ever-blessed Mary, Mother of God, was conceived without original sin, whilst they doubt not that St. John the Baptist was sanctified in his mother's womb by the same God, who, coming down from the highest heavens and from the throne of the Most Holy Trinity, was made flesh in the blessed womb of a virgin? What graces do we think could the Lord withhold from the woman who brought him



churches; but if Spain have but a doubtful claim to the institution of that festival of Mary, which is called in France and in England *the feast of the Normans*, she cannot be deprived of the honour of having been the first to erect churches and altars under the title of

forth by the splendid miracle of her fruitful virginity? Loving his mother as he loves her, he must have invested with the most glorious privileges her conception, her nativity, and the other phases of her holy life.

"Why raise up a doubt as to the glorious conception of a Virgin so privileged, and of whom we are obliged, by Catholic faith, to believe wonders and greatness beyond the reach of our imagination? Is it not, for all Christians, a much greater subject of admiration to see that a creature has begotten her Creator, and become a mother without ceasing to be a virgin? How, then, can the human mind give adequate praise to that glorious Virgin, destined by the Almighty to possess, without the slightest corruption, the advantages of divine maternity, conjointly with the glory of the purest virginity, and to be placed over all the prophets, over all the saints, and over all the choirs of angels, as their queen? Could the stain of original sin have been imputed to her even for an instant, there would then have been some deficiency of grace and of purity in that excellent Virgin, to whom the angel of the Lord, the ambassador of heaven, addressed these words: *Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women!* Let those persons who speak so unreasonably be now silent; let those who have only vain and frivolous arguments to propose against the Immaculate Conception, so privileged and so pure, of the blessed Virgin, be ashamed to publish them, because it was expedient that she should be endowed with so great purity, that after that of God there could be none such imagined. It is likewise most fitting that she who became the Mother of the Creator and Father of all things should have been ever and always purest, fairest, and most perfect, having been chosen from the beginning and before all ages, by an eternal decree of God, to bear in her womb Him whom the whole world and all the immensity of the heavens cannot contain.

"But we who, of all Catholic kings, have received, from this Mother of mercy, so many graces and benefits undeserved by us, we firmly believe that the conception of this blessed Virgin, in whose womb the Son of God vouchsafed to become man, was indeed holy and immaculate.

"Hence, we honour with a pure heart the mystery of that Immaculate and Blessed Conception of the most blessed Virgin, Mother of God; and we, with all the royal house, do annually solemnise the feast thereof, even as our most illustrious predecessors, of glorious memory, did celebrate the same, having established a perpetual confraternity thereof. Wherefore, we do hereby ordain that this festival of the Immaculate Conception be celebrated every year in perpetuity, with great solemnity and respect, throughout all the kingdoms subject unto us, by all faithful Catholics, whether religious or secular, priests and laity, of whatsoever state or condition they may be; and that, henceforward, it is not permitted, but expressly forbidden, to all preachers, and to all those who publicly expound the Gospel, to say, to advance, or to publish anything that might, in any way whatsoever, be prejudicial or hurtful to



the Mystery of the Immaculate Conception. In the year 1525, the Spaniards of Mexico placed the splendid cathedral of *Puebla de los Angeles* under the invocation of the immaculate Virgin, whose sacred image stood sparkling with jewels over an altar of massive silver, surrounded by a multitude of elegant pillars, with plinths and capitals of burnished gold. The faithful of Mexico raised in her honour, in their metropolitan church, an altar and a statue of massive silver, adorned with a magnificence truly Peruvian. A little later, the Mexican cathedrals of Merida, Maracaibo, and Nabana were founded under the invocation of the immaculate Virgin; nor did Peru remain behind. This splendid accession to the doctrine of the conception without sin, did not suffice for the zeal of the nations subject to the Spanish domination. In 1618, the vice-king of Naples, his court and his army, made a vow, in the Church of Our Lady the Great, to believe and to defend the immaculate conception of the Virgin. A commemorative pillar, surrounded by a

the purity and holiness of that Blessed Conception; but, on the contrary, we ordain that preachers, and other persons who have had opposite sentiments, shall keep silent, since the Catholic faith does not in any way oblige us to maintain and profess the contrary opinion; and that others, who cherish in their hearts our own holy and salutary opinion, may publish it in their discourses, and hasten to manifest their devotion by celebrating, through the praises of the Most High, the glory and honour of his holy mother, who is the queen of heaven, the gate of paradise, the protectress of our souls, the sure port of salvation, and the anchor of hope for sinners who have confidence in her. We now hereby expressly establish, in perpetuity, that if it happen that any preacher, or any other of our subjects, of any state or condition, do not observe this ordinance, without being necessary from some of our other edicts, that they be expelled from their convents and houses, and, whilst they retain that contrary opinion, they shall be driven, as our enemies, from all parts of our dominions. Commanding likewise, and decreeing, in our knowledge and mature deliberation, that all and each of our officers, whether at home or abroad, present or future, shall observe, and cause to be observed, with great diligence and respect, our present edict, as soon as they are made cognizant thereof; and that each, in his district, shall have it published exactly, solemnly, and with the sound of the trumpet in all the accustomed places, to the end that no one may plead ignorance, and that the devotion of the Immaculate Conception of the blessed Virgin, so long preserved in the hearts of Christians, may increase more and more, and that no one may ever again be heard to express a contrary opinion. In faith whereof we command that these present acts be dispatched everywhere, duly authorized by our sign and seal, hereto attached.—Given at Valencia, on the 2d of February, being the feast of the purification of that ever-blessed Virgin, the year of our Lord 1384, and the eighth of our reign."



magnificent statue of Our Lady, with the symbolical emblems of her victory over original sin, was raised in testimony of that public engagement so chivalrously contracted.

The Spanish people, who have at all times especially signalised themselves in this devotion, have adopted it so far that not a single preacher ascends a pulpit without prefacing his sermon by a profession of faith in the spotless conception,* and it has even been introduced into the familiar phrases used in greeting.†

Finally, in 1771, whilst the destroying wind of philosophy was violently shaking religious belief in France and several other countries of Europe, the King of Spain, Charles III., instituted an order in honour of the Virgin conceived without sin, and solemnly declared her, with the assembled Cortes and a brief of the Holy See, *Universal patrona de Espana e Indias*.‡

In France, notwithstanding the license and the incredulity which the flood of revolution has left after it, when retiring, this doctrine is gaining ground, and penetrating even to the most distant hamlets. The Diocese of Paris is particularly distinguished for its zeal in propagating this pious belief, which flourishes there under the protecting shadow of its archbishops,§ confirmed by the supernatural things related of the miraculous medal struck in honour of the mystery of the spotless Conception.

If the tradition of the Apostles, the inclination of the Church,

* Alabado sea el santísimo Sacramento del altar, y la Immaculada Concepcion de la Virgen Maria, concebida sin pecado original en el primer instante de su ser natural.

† On entering a Spanish house, the first words spoken by the visitor, even before wishing good day, are these: "Ave, Maria purisima;" the people of the house immediately answer: "Sin pecado concebida, santísima," (holiest, conceived without sin.)

‡ "Por la devocion que desde nuestra infancia hemos tenido á Maria santísima en su misterio de la Immaculada Concepcion, deseamos poner bajo los divinos auspicios de esta celestial protectora la... Nueva Orden, y mandamos que sea reconocida en ella por patrona..." (*Ley. 12, t. iii., l. vi. Noviss. Rec.*)

§ "It is a fact we would wish to establish, and to make known in even the most remote parts of the Catholic world: in our Diocese, this devotion has been rooted deeper and deeper with passing time, and misfortunes have come in plenty to confirm, increase, and extend it with marvellous rapidity." (*See the mandamus of His Grace the Archbishop of Paris on the occasion of the consecration of the Church of Our Lady of Loretto*.)

the authority of Councils, the adhesion of universities and religious orders, the assent of kings and nations, the dedication of temples and altars, the foundation of offices, the institution of confraternities and royal orders have any weight in a controversy which has astonished the Pagans themselves,* then the cause of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, so long pending before the tribunal of Catholic opinion, appears to us gained; and we do not think it rash to suppose that God, preserving his divine Mother from the original stain, has said to her, as Assuerus did to Esther, "This law is not made for thee, but for all others."

CHAPTER III.

THE BIRTH OF MARY.

ABOUT the time when the religion and prosperity of the Hebrews was on the decline, at the period pointed out by the prophets, and when the royal sceptre was in stranger hands, according to the great prediction of Jacob, there was in Nazareth, a city of Lower Galilee, not far from Mount Carmel, a just man named Joachim,† of the tribe of Juda and the race of David‡ by Nathan; his wife, who, according to the opinion of St. Augustine, was of the sacerdotal

* "How!" exclaimed Julian the Apostate, addressing himself to a bishop who maintained the universality of original sin; "How! dost thou, then, subject the birth of Mary to the empire of the Devil!" (St. Augustine, l. iv., *Op. imperf.*)

† A biographer of Mary, Christopher de Castro, discovered, according to the Rabbins, St. Hilary and other Fathers of the Church, that the father of Mary had two names, Heli and Joachim. The Arabs and the Mussulmans know him under that of Amram, son of Matheus, and distinguish him from another Amram, father of Mary, the sister of Moses. (D'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale*, t. ii.)

‡ According to the proto-Gospel of St. James and the Gospel of the nativity of Mary, Joachim was of the race of David. Justin, who flourished only fifty years after the death of St. John the Apostle, who was born in Palestine, and was in a position to collect traditions still quite recent, likewise says that Mary was descended in a direct line from David

tribe,* was called Anne, a name which, in Hebrew, signifies *graceful*.†

They were both just before Jehovah, and walked in the way of His commandments with a perfect heart;‡ but the Lord seemed to have turned away his face from them, for a great blessing was wanting unto them; they were childless, and therefore sorrowful, because in Israel barrenness was a disgrace.

Joachim, who loved his wife for her exceeding mildness and her eminent virtues, would not increase her misfortune by giving her those letters of divorce which the law then granted so easily;§ he kept her with him, and that pious pair, humbly resigned to the divine behest, passed their days in labour, prayer, and alms-deeds.

So many virtues could not go unrewarded; after twenty years of barrenness, Anne conceived, as it were by a miracle, and brought forth that favoured creature who was more perfect, more holy, and more agreeable to the Lord than all the elect taken together.

It was about the beginning of the month Tisri,|| which is the first of the civil year of the Jews, whilst the smoke of holocausts was

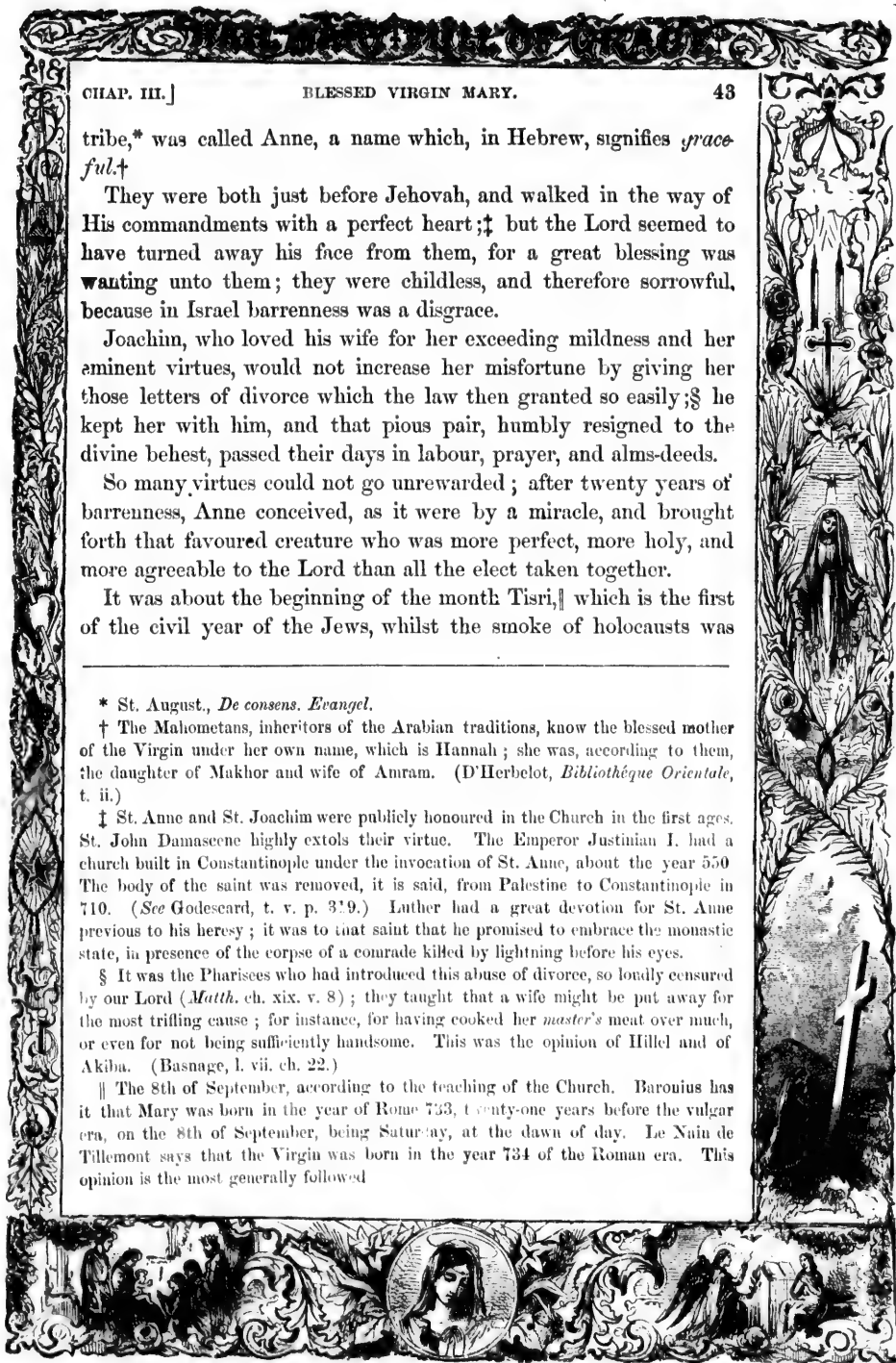
* St. August., *De consens. Evangel.*

† The Mahometans, inheritors of the Arabian traditions, know the blessed mother of the Virgin under her own name, which is Hannah; she was, according to them, the daughter of Makhor and wife of Amram. (D'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale*, t. ii.)

‡ St. Anne and St. Joachim were publicly honoured in the Church in the first ages. St. John Damascene highly extols their virtue. The Emperor Justinian I. had a church built in Constantinople under the invocation of St. Anne, about the year 550. The body of the saint was removed, it is said, from Palestine to Constantinople in 710. (See Godescard, t. v. p. 319.) Luther had a great devotion for St. Anne previous to his heresy; it was to that saint that he promised to embrace the monastic state, in presence of the corpse of a comrade killed by lightning before his eyes.

§ It was the Pharisees who had introduced this abuse of divorce, so loudly censured by our Lord (*Matth.* ch. xix. v. 8); they taught that a wife might be put away for the most trifling cause; for instance, for having cooked her master's meat over much, or even for not being sufficiently handsome. This was the opinion of Hillel and of Akiba. (Basnage, l. vii. ch. 22.)

|| The 8th of September, according to the teaching of the Church. Baronius has it that Mary was born in the year of Rome 753, twenty-one years before the vulgar era, on the 8th of September, being Saturday, at the dawn of day. Le Nain de Tillemont says that the Virgin was born in the year 754 of the Roman era. This opinion is the most generally followed.



ascending to heaven for the expiation of the sins of the people, that the promised Virgin was born—she who was to repair the primitive fault;* her birth was humble, like that of her divine Son; her parents were of the people, although descended from a long line of kings, and led, to all appearance, an obscure life; that mystical rose, whom St. John afterwards beheld clothed with the sun as with a radiant garment, was to blossom, in the scorching wind of adversity, on a withered and leafless stem.†

The cradle of the Queen of Angels was neither adorned with gold nor covered with the richly-embroidered quilts of Egypt, neither perfumed with spikenard, myrrh, nor aloes, like those of the Hebrew princes; it was formed of flexible branches, and bands of coarse linen confined the little arms which were one day to cradle the Saviour of the world. The children of kings, whilst still wrapped up in their sumptuous swaddling-clothes, behold the great ones of the land humbling themselves before them, and calling them by high-sounding titles. The woman who was to be the spouse and the mother of God bestowed her first smile on poor humble women, who perhaps said within themselves, as they remembered the obscurity and hardship of their lot, "Another slave is born!"

It was the custom amongst the Israelites to assemble the family on the ninth day, in order to give the new-born child its name. The daughter of Joachim received from her father the name of Miriam (Mary), which means, in the Syriac language, *lady, sovereign, mistress*, and in Hebrew, *star of the sea*.

"And assuredly," says St. Bernard, "the Mother of God could

* Here is what the Turks relate regarding the birth of the blessed Virgin. The wife of Amram (*Joachim*) said to God, "Lord, I have consecrated to thee the fruit of my womb; vouchsafe to receive it, O Thou who knowest and hearest all." When she had brought forth, she added, "Lord, I have brought a daughter into the world; I have called her Miriam (Mary); I place her under thy protection, she and her posterity, to the end that thou mayst preserve them from the snares of Satan." (Koran, ch. iii.)

† Isaias had foretold it, saying: *There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root*; for this word *rod* signifies, in Hebrew, as St. Jerome observes (*in Is. c. xi.*) a stem without branches and without leaves, to denote, continues this holy doctor, that the august Mary was to be born of the race of David, when that family should have lost its splendour and its royalty.

not have a name more appropriate, nor more expressive of her high dignity. Mary is, in fact, that fair and luminous star which shines over the vast and stormy sea of this world."

There is hidden in that divine name a spell so potent, and of such marvellous sweetness, that merely to pronounce it softens the heart, merely to write it beautifies the style. "The name of Mary," says St. Anthony of Padua, "is sweeter to the lips than honey,* more grateful to the ear than the sweetest music, more delicious to the heart than the purest joy."

Eighty days after the birth of a daughter, the Jewish woman was solemnly purified in the temple where she offered her first-born child. Conformably to the law of Moses, she then offered to the Lord a lamb or two doves; the latter was the holy offering of the poor, and was that of Joachim's wife.

But the gratitude of the pious mother went still farther than the customary sacrifice; worthy imitator of Anna, the wife of Elcana, she offered to the Lord a victim more pure, a dove more innocent than those which fell bleeding and palpitating under the sacrificing knife. She had no votive crown of purest gold wherewith to adorn the walls of the temple;† she laid at the feet of the Most High the crown of her old age, the child whom He had given her, and solemnly promised to bring back her daughter to the Temple, and to consecrate her to the service of the holy place as soon as her mind was capable of knowing good from evil. Mary's father ratified this vow, which then became binding.‡

The ceremony being finished, the holy couple took their way back to their own country, to that country so barren in regard to great

* *Nomen Virginis Mariæ, mel in ore, melos in aure, jubilum in corde*, is the poetical expression of St. Anthony of Padua.

† *Matth. lib. i. cap. 4.*

‡ There were amongst the Jews two sorts of vows; the first, *neder*, was a simple vow, after which men could purchase a dispensation of what they had vowed to the Lord (of this kind was the vow of Anne, mother of Mary); the second, *cherem*, was a vow indispensably binding, whereby all right and title to the thing promised was irrevocably given up. Every Israelite could thus consecrate whatever belonged to him—houses, lands, cattle, children, slaves, &c.; and the things so consecrated could neither be sold nor redeemed at any price whatsoever.



men that Israel was far from expecting a prophet to arise there,* and they returned to their humble dwelling, which was ever the asylum of the poor and the stranger. There it was that the child of benediction, the child of grace and of miracle, passed her early years, the delight of her family, growing up like one of those lilies whose loveliness is praised by Jesus Christ himself, and which have, as St. Bernard poetically says, "the odour of hope," *habens odorem spei*. Anne was herself to nurse the child, according to the custom of her people.†

Mary's understanding, like the day in some favoured regions, had scarcely a dawn, and shone clearly out from her earliest days. Her precocious fervour and the wisdom of her discourse, at a period of life when other children still enjoy but a purely physical existence, made the parents judge that the time of their separation was come; and when Joachim had offered to the Lord, for the third time since the birth of his daughter, the first-fruits of the crops and fruits of his small inheritance, the husband and wife, grateful and resigned, set out for Jerusalem, in order to deposit within the sacred precincts of the temple the treasure which they had received from the HOLY ONE of Israel.

* "Can anything good come forth from Nazareth?" asked Nathaniel of those who spoke to him of Christ. "Because the place was small and contemptible," says St. John Chrysostom, "and not only that particular place, but the whole of Galilee." (*Serm. 9, in S. Matth.*)

† In Judca, the women did not often dispense with nursing their children; there are only three nurses mentioned in Scripture; they are those of Rebecca, of Miphboseth, and of Joas; then it is to be observed that Rebecca was a foreigner, and the others royal personages.



CHAPTER IV.

THE PRESENTATION.

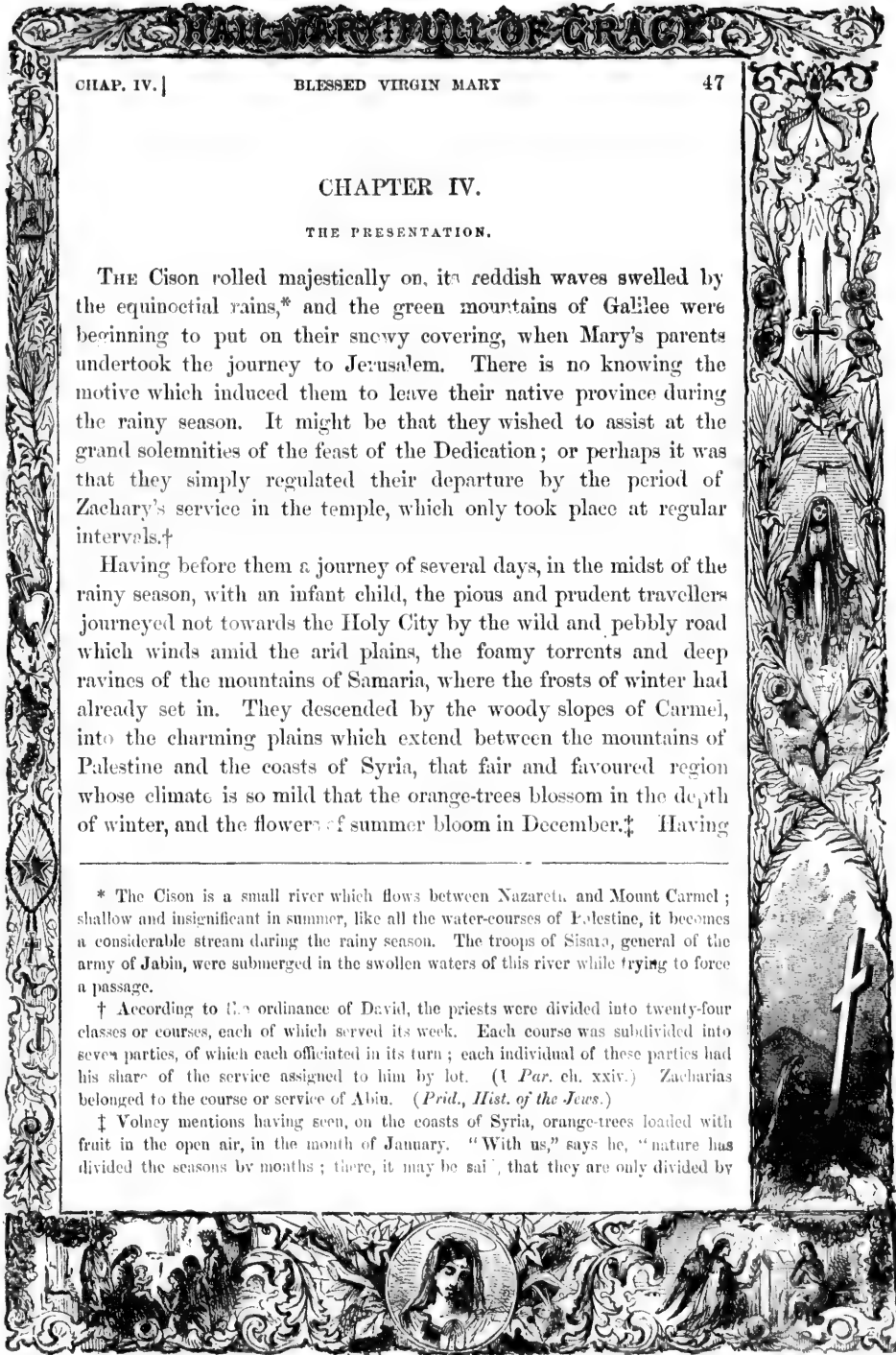
THE Cison rolled majestically on, its reddish waves swelled by the equinoctial rains,* and the green mountains of Galilee were beginning to put on their snowy covering, when Mary's parents undertook the journey to Jerusalem. There is no knowing the motive which induced them to leave their native province during the rainy season. It might be that they wished to assist at the grand solemnities of the feast of the Dedication; or perhaps it was that they simply regulated their departure by the period of Zachary's service in the temple, which only took place at regular intervals.†

Having before them a journey of several days, in the midst of the rainy season, with an infant child, the pious and prudent travellers journeyed not towards the Holy City by the wild and pebbly road which winds amid the arid plains, the foamy torrents and deep ravines of the mountains of Samaria, where the frosts of winter had already set in. They descended by the woody slopes of Carmel, into the charming plains which extend between the mountains of Palestine and the coasts of Syria, that fair and favoured region whose climate is so mild that the orange-trees blossom in the depth of winter, and the flowers of summer bloom in December.‡ Having

* The Cison is a small river which flows between Nazareth and Mount Carmel; shallow and insignificant in summer, like all the water-courses of Palestine, it becomes a considerable stream during the rainy season. The troops of Sisara, general of the army of Jabin, were submerged in the swollen waters of this river while trying to force a passage.

† According to the ordinance of David, the priests were divided into twenty-four classes or courses, each of which served its week. Each course was subdivided into seven parties, of which each officiated in its turn; each individual of these parties had his share of the service assigned to him by lot. (*1 Par. ch. xxiv.*) Zacharias belonged to the course or service of Abiu. (*Prid., Hist. of the Jews.*)

‡ Volney mentions having seen, on the coasts of Syria, orange-trees loaded with fruit in the open air, in the month of January. "With us," says he, "nature has divided the seasons by months; there, it may be said, that they are only divided by



left behind them the rich pasturage—lands where rose of old the tents of Issachar, that race of pastoral astronomers* whom the burning breath of the wrath of God had scattered, like a handful of straw, over the wild and mountainous regions of Media; having admired as they passed, the groves of palms, banana-trees and pomegranates clothing the hills which were once the fair inheritance of the children of Joseph, that noble and warlike race, renowned for their skill in archery, our Galilean travellers sped along by the small water-course of Gaas, overhung by its graceful willows, traversed the groves of Ramatha, that pretty town which resembles a cameo laid in a basket of roses, and at length gained the confines of the ancient territory of the Jebusites. There, all was changed: no more flowers, no more verdure, no more balmy breezes laden with the perfumes of the citron-tree. All around were sterile rocks, profound ravines through which the wind swept in mournful murmurs; abrupt and craggy mountains, resounding with the hoarse cry of the eagle; in a word, a landscape the grandest, the most desolate, and the most cheerless that can well be imagined.

The little party had been following, for some time, a rugged path which crossed the table-land of a barren mountain, when Joachim suddenly stopt at an abrupt turn of the road, and stretched his arm towards the south with an emotion of religious exultation mingled with national pride. The object which he thus pointed out to his companions was well worthy of being remarked, for Asia had then nothing more magnificent or fantastic. It was a city about thirty-three stadas in circumference; set in stone like a ruby of Beloochistan; a city of marble, of cedar and of gold, whose splendour

hours. At Tripoli, we suffer from the excessive warmth of July: six hours journey brings us to the adjacent mountains where the air has the temperature of March. On the other hand, we are chilled by the frost of December in the mountain districts: a day's journey brings us to the shore where we find the summer-flowers in bloom.

St. Jerome says that the sons of Issachar were the sages who made the chronological calculations, and marked the festivals. (Hieron., *Quæst. in 1 Parol.* 112, p. 1390, *et in Gen.*, 49.) This tradition agrees with that of the rabbins, who relate that the tribe of Issachar were much given to the study of astronomy. (Maimon., in *Kiddosch, hachodesch, et Zachuth, in Juchasin.*) Finally, the Scripture authorizes this tradition, since it mentions that the sons of Issachar *knew all times to order what Israel should do.* (1 Par. xii. 32.)

had in it something gloomy, ferocious and suspicious, denoting an unsettled power and a permanent dread of the stranger; a state of things abounding in strange contrasts. There were seen enormous towers, magnificent as palaces, and palaces fortified like citadels. Its temple, radiant with gold, stood glittering on a narrow table-land of the highest mountain, like the full-orbed moon when it rises over the snowy heights of Lebanon.* It was an almost impregnable fortress, held in awe by the people of God, whilst the tower of Antonia, with its four elegant turrets of polished marble, kept jealous and unceasing watch over the precincts of the temple.

A triple enclosure of massive stone walls,† with ninety forts, encompassed that singular city, and all around it lay gloomy valleys, dizzy heights and inaccessible rocks. That stately and warlike city, which seemed as though it were transported by magic from the fabulous regions of Ginnistan,‡ to be placed under the cloudless sky of Palestine, was that Jewish paradise (*Ghangh-dix-houcht*), so poetically mourned on the banks of the Euphrates, the city of David and the Maccabees; that Jerusalem which, even in its slavish abjection, is still hailed throughout the East by the ancient appellation then given it by the father of Mary: *el Cods* (the Holy City)!

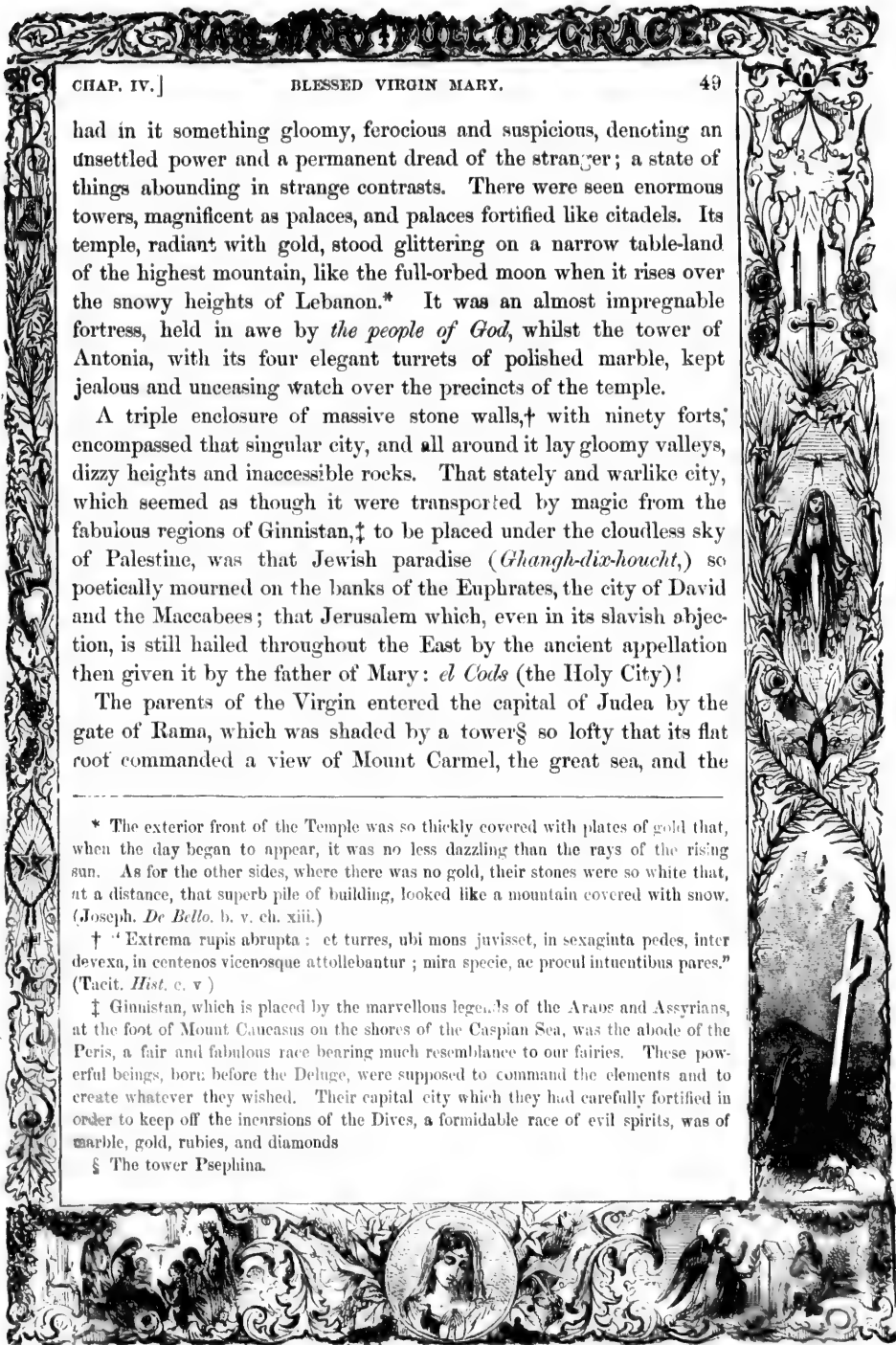
The parents of the Virgin entered the capital of Judea by the gate of Rama, which was shaded by a tower§ so lofty that its flat roof commanded a view of Mount Carmel, the great sea, and the

* The exterior front of the Temple was so thickly covered with plates of gold that, when the day began to appear, it was no less dazzling than the rays of the rising sun. As for the other sides, where there was no gold, their stones were so white that, at a distance, that superb pile of building, looked like a mountain covered with snow. (Joseph. *De Bello*. b. v. ch. xiii.)

† "Extrema rupis abrupta : et turres, ubi mons juvisset, in sexaginta pedes, inter dexa, in centenos vicinosque attollebantur ; mira specie, ac procul intuentibus pares." (Tacit. *Hist.* c. v.)

‡ Ginnistan, which is placed by the marvellous legends of the Arabs and Assyrians, at the foot of Mount Caucasus on the shores of the Caspian Sea, was the abode of the Peris, a fair and fabulous race bearing much resemblance to our fairies. These powerful beings, born before the Deluge, were supposed to command the elements and to create whatever they wished. Their capital city which they had carefully fortified in order to keep off the incursions of the Dives, a formidable race of evil spirits, was of marble, gold, rubies, and diamonds

§ The tower Psephina.



mountains of Arabia. From its summit still floated the greet banner of Judas Maccabeus with its sacred device; no longer understood by the soldiers who kept guard around, for they were Thracians, Galatians, Germans, and the fair-haired sons of Gaul, whom Herod, in his fear of the Jews, kept always in pay, and who were almost as odious as himself to the people.

The travellers then took their way through some dark and winding streets, bordered with heavy-looking square houses, without windows, their flat roofs forming long unbroken lines that looked like fortifications, and stopped in the eastern part of the city, in front of a house of unpretending appearance, pointed out by tradition as the dwelling of St. Anne.*

Having purified himself for seven days, according to the custom of those who went to offer sacrifice in the temple,† Joachim provided himself with the lamb which he was to present to the Lord, put on white garments,‡ gathered together such of his relations and friends as he had in Jerusalem, and went up with them to the temple as resolutely as though he were about to make an assault.§

That temple of the Lord of Hosts, where the Virgin then presented herself like the dove with the olive branch, had undergone numerous vicissitudes. One of the ancestors of Mary, the wise son of David, had made it the glory of the East. He lavished upon it the gold of Ophir, the perfumes of Saba, the cedar of Lebanon, brass which the fleets of Tyre brought from far off lands, and silver,

A monastery was erected on this house of St. Anne, but it has since been converted into a mosque. Under the Christian kings, it was inhabited by nuns. (See *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, vol. 2, p. 211.)

† It was not only that they had to present themselves in the Temple with their victim; the law required that they should remain outside for seven entire days, and that they should solemnly purify themselves on the third and seventh days with ashes and hyssop; that done, they might offer their sacrifice. (Philo, *Tract de Sacrif.*, c. 3.)

‡ According to the Rabbins, the sacrifice was null when he who offered it was not clothed in white. (Basn. b. ix. ch. 4.)

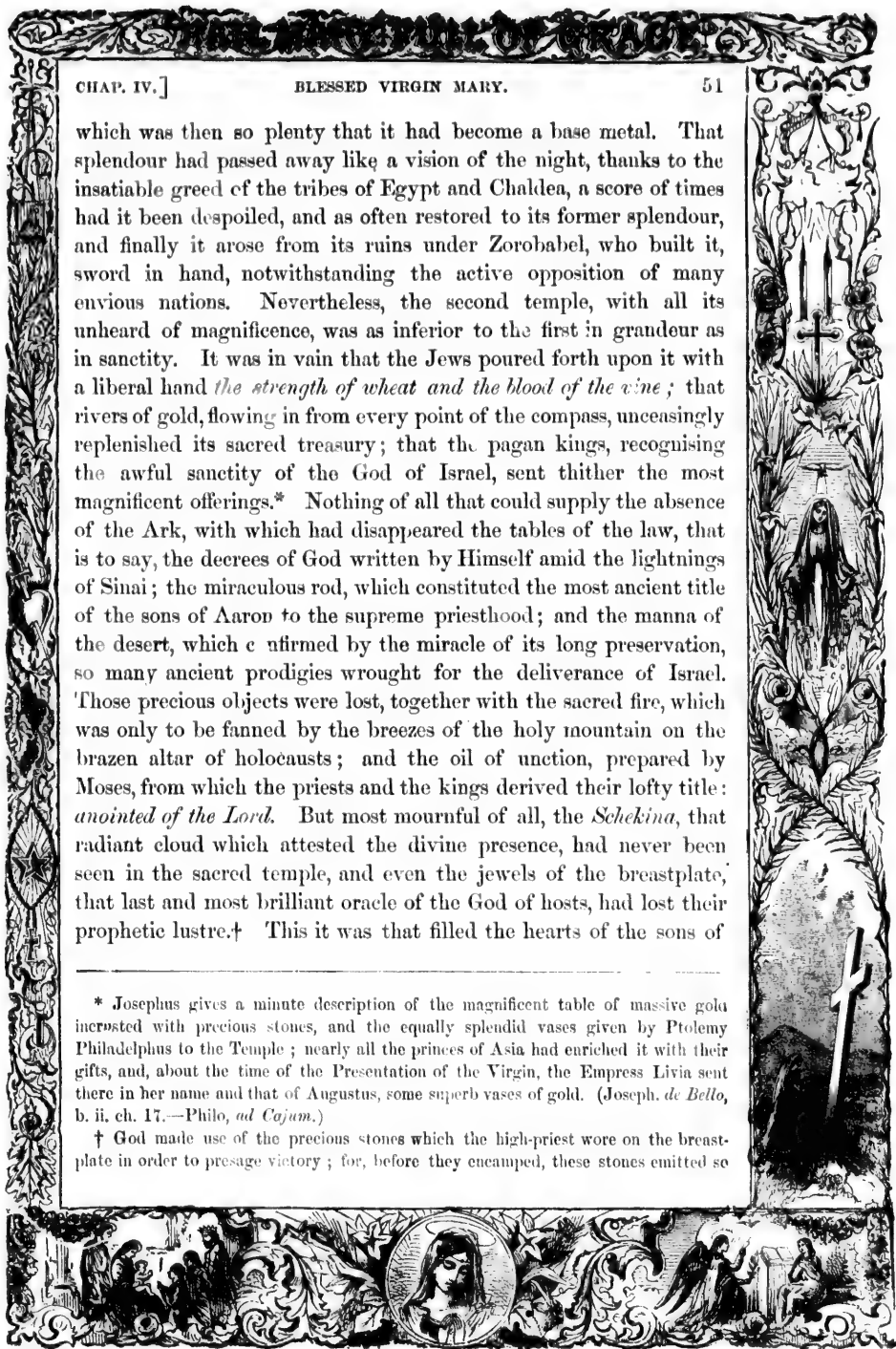
§ This was of obligation; the Hebrews were to go up to the Temple with as much ardour as a soldier goes up to battle; they found this precept in the fifty-fifth Psalm, where David said that he went to the house of God as to a strong city. (See Basn., *Histoire des Juifs.*, b. vii. ch. 17.)



which was then so plenty that it had become a base metal. That splendour had passed away like a vision of the night, thanks to the insatiable greed of the tribes of Egypt and Chaldea, a score of times had it been despoiled, and as often restored to its former splendour, and finally it arose from its ruins under Zorobabel, who built it, sword in hand, notwithstanding the active opposition of many envious nations. Nevertheless, the second temple, with all its unheard of magnificence, was as inferior to the first in grandeur as in sanctity. It was in vain that the Jews poured forth upon it with a liberal hand *the strength of wheat and the blood of the vine*; that rivers of gold, flowing in from every point of the compass, unceasingly replenished its sacred treasury; that the pagan kings, recognising the awful sanctity of the God of Israel, sent thither the most magnificent offerings.* Nothing of all that could supply the absence of the Ark, with which had disappeared the tables of the law, that is to say, the decrees of God written by Himself amid the lightnings of Sinai; the miraculous rod, which constituted the most ancient title of the sons of Aaron to the supreme priesthood; and the manna of the desert, which confirmed by the miracle of its long preservation, so many ancient prodigies wrought for the deliverance of Israel. Those precious objects were lost, together with the sacred fire, which was only to be fanned by the breezes of the holy mountain on the brazen altar of holocausts; and the oil of unction, prepared by Moses, from which the priests and the kings derived their lofty title: *anointed of the Lord*. But most mournful of all, the *Schekina*, that radiant cloud which attested the divine presence, had never been seen in the sacred temple, and even the jewels of the breastplate, that last and most brilliant oracle of the God of hosts, had lost their prophetic lustre.† This it was that filled the hearts of the sons of

* Josephus gives a minute description of the magnificent table of massive gold incrustated with precious stones, and the equally splendid vases given by Ptolemy Philadelphus to the Temple; nearly all the princes of Asia had enriched it with their gifts, and, about the time of the Presentation of the Virgin, the Empress Livia sent there in her name and that of Augustus, some superb vases of gold. (Joseph. *de Bello*, b. ii. ch. 17.—Philo, *ad Cajum*.)

† God made use of the precious stones which the high-priest wore on the breastplate in order to presage victory; for, before they encamped, these stones emitted so



Aaron with bitterness when they compared the house of Zorobabel with the temple of the son of David; and this it was that made the doctors of the law declare that the fulfilment of the prophecy of Aggeus was not to be hoped for, unless the Messiah himself appeared in person in the new temple.

Having passed that magnificent gate of Corinthian brass which twenty Levites could hardly close at night, and which, to the great dismay of the Deicide people,* opened of its own accord four years before the ruin of Jerusalem, Mary and her parents found themselves in a vast enclosure paved with black and white flags, and surrounded by lofty piazzas which, in time of war, served as ramparts.† A crowd of strangers and of natives, whose brilliant costumes of glaring colours recalled the idea of an immense bed of tulips, walked to and fro in conversation in that forum of Jerusalem, which was not considered sacred, and was called the Gentiles' Porch, because idolaters could not, under pain of death, advance farther.‡

At some distance from the crowd, under Solomon's porch, stood the proud aristocrats of Israel, clad in scarlet and purple, or in those long Babylonian robes embroidered with gold, which cost enormous sums, awaiting the hour of prayer, and detaching themselves from the strangers with a haughty reserve that savoured of contempt. Joachim, whose birth, notwithstanding his poverty, was as noble as that of any of the princes of his people, bent his steps in that direction, sure of a cordial reception; for those Jews, so disdainful towards the Gentiles,§ were amongst themselves like brethren, espe-

bright a lustre that the people thereby recognised the presence and assistance of his divine majesty; but for two hundred years past, the breast-plate has ceased to emit that light. (Fl. Joseph. *Ant. Jud.*, b. iii. ch. 8.)

* Joseph., *de Bello*, l. vi.

† Tacit., *Historiarum*, l. v.

‡ Joseph. *de Bello*, l. v. and vi.

§ Basnage remarks that at the time of Jesus Christ the Jews regarded the Gentiles as dogs, and mortally hated them. "If idolaters are drowning," taught the doctors, "no one is to take them out of the water, or render them any assistance; the utmost that can be done for them is not to plunge them deeper into the water, or throw them farther down the precipice." (Basnage, l. vii. ch. 25.)

cially when they belonged to the same line. Scarcely had they perceived him when a number of illustrious ladies, warriors, and princes of the house of David, came to meet him, and, after the usual salutations, they joined the Galilean family, as though to form a suitable train for Mary.* The Fathers, who note this circumstance, have piously supposed that those great personages, the flower of the Jewish nobility, were not there by mere accident, but that God, who would have the future mother of the Messiah enter the temple in triumph, had divinely inspired them to be there at that particular time.

In the middle of the Gentiles' Porch arose two other enclosures, sacred, which composed the temple. Seen from below, the majestic and resplendent edifice presented a quadrangular mass, whose walls, of alabaster whiteness, were pierced with ten superb gates covered with thick plates of gold and silver. As the temple, properly so called, crowned the summit of Mount Moria, a becoming site for the dwelling of the *God of Mountains*, the ground had a gradual ascent, and the walls were completely surrounded by marble steps, which somewhat concealed their height.

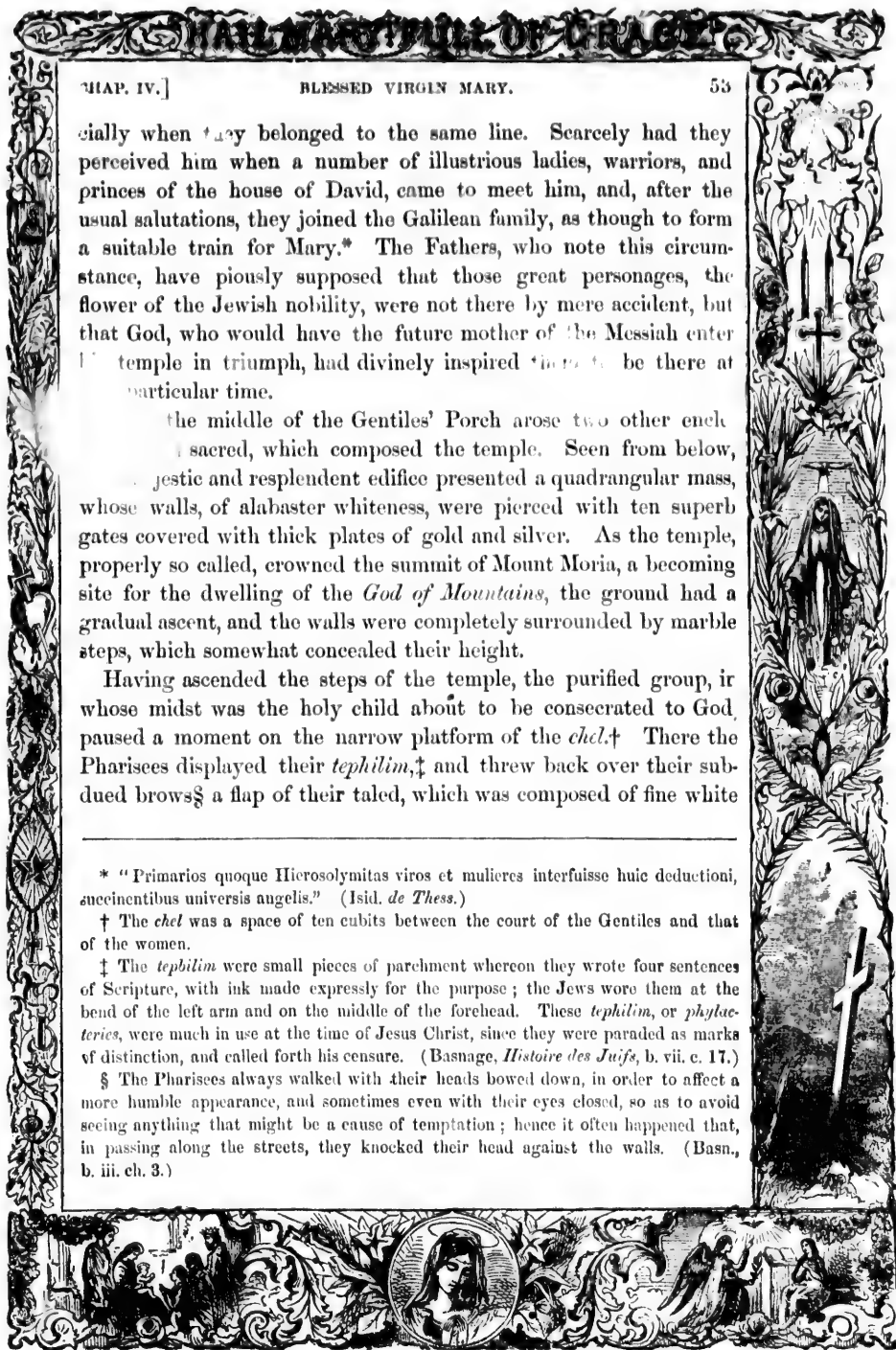
Having ascended the steps of the temple, the purified group, in whose midst was the holy child about to be consecrated to God, paused a moment on the narrow platform of the *chel*.† There the Pharisees displayed their *tephilim*,‡ and threw back over their subdued brows§ a flap of their taled, which was composed of fine white

* "Primarios quoque Hierosolymitas viros et mulieres interfuisse huic deductioni, aeneientibus universis angelis." (Isid. de *Thess.*)

† The *chel* was a space of ten cubits between the court of the Gentiles and that of the women.

‡ The *tephilim* were small pieces of parchment whereon they wrote four sentences of Scripture, with ink made expressly for the purpose; the Jews wore them at the bend of the left arm and on the middle of the forehead. These *tephilim*, or *phylacteries*, were much in use at the time of Jesus Christ, since they were paraded as marks of distinction, and called forth his censure. (Basnage, *Histoire des Juifs*, b. vii. c. 17.)

§ The Pharisees always walked with their heads bowed down, in order to affect a more humble appearance, and sometimes even with their eyes closed, so as to avoid seeing anything that might be a cause of temptation; hence it often happened that, in passing along the streets, they knocked their head against the walls. (Basn., b. iii. ch. 3.)





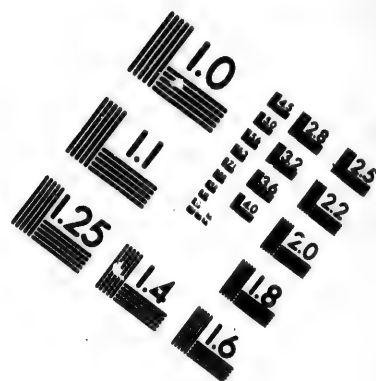
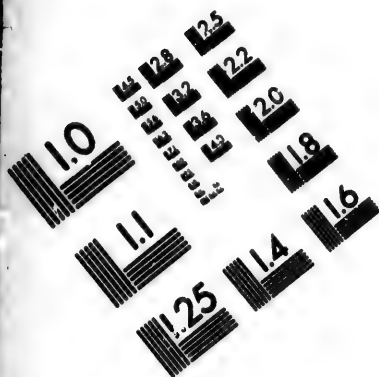
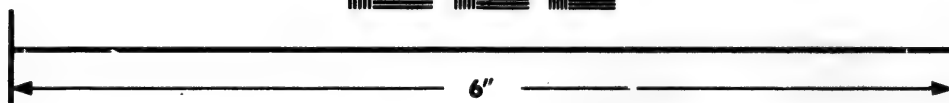
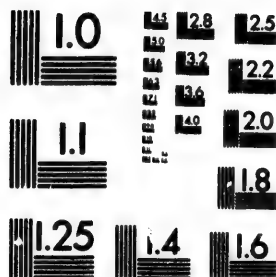


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wool,* adorned with purple pomegranates and small violet twists. The undaunted captains of Herod half concealed their dazzling breastplates under their long cloaks, and the daughters of Sion wrapped themselves more closely in their veils of purple, of azure, or of Syrian gauze embroidered with gold, through respect for the holy angels of the sanctuary.† That done, they entered the temple by the eastern gate, the most gorgeous of all; that gate which poured forth streams of liquid gold when the Romans, unable to force an entrance through it, opened it by means of fire.‡

In our cold northern regions vast edifices are required to shelter the people from the inclemency of the weather. Hence, we have immense cathedrals, made to contain whole multitudes; but in ancient Asia the temples were for little else than the use of the priests; the people prayed without. In Israel, the *engdah* or sacred assembly was usually held in the women's court. The second enclosure was so called because the Jewish women, whom the old law, in its severity, assimilated to slaves, could not advance farther. Separated from their sons and husbands, who remained, during the religious ceremonies, either in the open air of the square or under the arches of the peristyle, they prayed apart in the upper galleries, their heads humbly inclined towards the house of Jehovah, whose magnificent roof of cedar, bristling with needles of gold, they beheld at some distance.§

The ceremony of the presentation undoubtedly took place in the women's court, and not in the very interior of the sanctuary, as some authors have said. It opened with a solemn sacrifice. The gate of Nicanor, opening to admit the victim, gave a perspective view of

* *Taled*, a species of square cloak which the Jews wore while praying in the temple; some fastened it around their neck, others threw it over their head; this last custom was the most general. (Basnage, t. v. b. vii. ch. 17.)

† Ideo debet mulier potestatem habere supra caput propter angelos. (1 Cor. xi. 10.)

‡ Josephus mentions that, when Titus gave orders to set fire to the gates of the second enclosure of the temple, the molten gold and silver ran down in streams, as water streams from a fountain. (*De Bello*, c. xxiii.)

§ This precaution had been taken in order to prevent the doves and pigeons, who were very numerous in Jerusalem, from resting on the temple and soiling its roof.

the inner enclosure, like a glimpse of that lost paradise whose golden palaces, shaded by lofty cedars, were, as the Pharisees taught, the dwelling of the just.* Through the marble columns of a stately portico, overhung by the gigantic leaves and fruit of a golden vine, there was seen a structure which, at first sight, seemed of massive gold, so dazzling was the effect of its golden front of a hundred cubits as it reflected the rays of the Asiatic sun. An incredible number of votive garlands, whose ears of corn, lilies, pomegranates, and vine-leaves were composed of emeralds, topazes, carbuncles, rubies, according to their colour, were attached to the walls by cords of gold; and when the wild mountain-breeze agitated their leaves, you would have taken them for real flowers, so exquisite was the workmanship and so perfect the imitation of nature. Here and there were seen tattered and blood-stained banners, wrested by the brave Asmonian princes from the Greeks of Syria in the glorious wars of the Independence, and consecrated to the God of Hosts by their priestly and warrior hands. Herod, that cruel prince but valiant leader, had recently added thereto the standards taken in his successful expeditions against the Arabs; and the sight of those warlike trophies filled with patriot pride and martial ardour those Jewish hearts, who regarded death as a trifling thing when there was question of fighting for what was dearer to them than gold, family, and life—the temple!

The priests and the Levites assembled in the inner enclosure received from the hands of Joachim the victim of *prosperity*.† Those ministers of the living God were not crowned with laurel, like the Pagan priests. A sort of round mitre, composed of very thick linen; a linen tunic, long, white, and without fullness, confined by a broad zone embroidered with sky-blue and purple; these composed the sacerdotal costume, which was worn only in the temple.

* The Jews believed that the souls of the just went to the garden of Eden, from which the living were debarred by the angel of death. They are sublime in their descriptions of this place, whose palaces, they say, are of precious stones, and its rivers of odorous perfumes. In hell, on the contrary, a river of fire flows over the damned, who suffer the extremes of heat and cold. (Maimonides, Menasse, &c.)

† Whether they asked a favour of God, or thanked him for having bestowed one, it was called the *sacrifice of prosperity*.

One of the sacrificers took the lamb, and, after a short invocation to the God of Jacob, slaughtered him, turning his head towards the north; the blood was caught in a vase of brass and sprinkled around the temple. These preliminary rites being gone through, the priest arranged on a golden dish a portion of the flesh of the victim, together with part of the entrails, which had been carefully washed by the Levites in the hall of the spring. He wrapped up the oblation in a coat of fat, covered it with incense, and threw upon it the salt of the covenant; then, ascending barefoot to the platform in front of the brazen altar, he deposited the offering on the sound, firm logs, which, stripped of their bark, fed the sacred fire. The remainder of the host, with the exception of the breast and the right shoulder, which belonged to the priests, was given back to Joachim, in order to furnish a banquet for his friends and neighbours, according to custom.*

The last sounds of the priestly trumpets were dying away along the arched roof, and the sacrifice was still burning on the brazen altar, when a priest descended to the women's court in order to complete the ceremony. Anne, followed by Joachim, and bearing Mary in her arms, advanced, veiled, towards the minister of the Most High, and (if we may believe an Arabian tradition which Mahomet himself inserted in the Koran) presented to him the young servant of the Lord, saying, in a tremulous voice, "I come to offer you the gift which God gave to me."†

* This festival, which was considered sacred, might be kept up two days in succession, but the law expressly prohibited keeping anything of the third. While it lasted, the poor were to have their full share, and that for two reasons, says Philo. Firstly, because the victim belonged to God, who is bountiful by nature, and wished that the needy should be relieved; secondly, for fear that avarice, which is a slavish vice, might creep in and dishonour a pious practice. (Philo, *Tract de Sacrif.*, c. ii.)

† According to a Mahometan tradition, when St. Anne was delivered of the blessed Virgin, she presented her to the priests, saying these words, which are also found in the Koran, "*Dhouncon hadih alne-dhirat*;" that is to say, "Behold the offering which I make to thee." Hossain Vaer adds to these words, in his Persian paraphrase, "*Kih ez an Khodai*," which signifies, "For this is a gift which God has given me;" or rather, word for word, "For it is from this gift that God is to come." (D'Herbelot, *Bibl. Orient.*, t. ii. p. 620.)

The priest accepted, in the name of God, who fructifies the womb of mothers, the precious deposit which gratitude confided to him, and blessed Joachim and his pious companion;* then extending his hands over the assembly who bowed down to receive his pontifical blessing:† "O Israel," said he, "may the Lord shed his light upon thee; may he prosper thee in all thy ways, and grant thee peace!" A canticle of thanksgiving, harmoniously accompanied by the priestly harps, terminated the presentation of the Virgin.

Such was the ceremony which took place about the end of November, in the holy temple of Sion. Men, who usually go no farther than the surface, saw there only a young child of marvellous beauty and precocious piety, consecrated by her mother to the God who had granted her to her tears and mortifications; but the angels of heaven, hovering over the sanctuary, beheld in that fair and fragile creature THE VIRGIN of Isaiah, the spouse whose mystic hymn was sung by Solomon, the celestial Eve who came to restore to a fallen race the hope of a glorious immortality. Penetrated with joy to see the dawn of the Messiah's day at last appear, "they thronged," say the ancient authors,‡ "to that earthly festival, and, covering with their snowy wings the youthful descendant of the royal David, they strewed her path with the odoriferous flowers of paradise, and celebrated her entry into the temple by melodious concerts."

Who can tell what was then passing in Mary's soul, that soul prematurely blown by the breath of the sanctifying Spirit, wherein all was peace, and light, and love? By what secret bonds was she united to Him who had preferred her before the virgins and queens

* Eli blessed Elcana and his wife, and said to the former, "May the Lord give you yet other children by this woman, because of the deposit which you have placed in his hands." And they returned to their home. (Kings, b. i ch. ii. ver. 20.) See Père Croiset on this ceremony. (*Exercices de Piété*, t. xviii. p. 48.)

† Whilst the high-priest gave his blessing, the people were obliged to place their hands on their eyes and to hide their face, because they were not permitted to look upon the hands of the priest. The Jews imagined that God was behind the pontiff, looking at them through his outstretched hands; they dared not raise their eyes, then, to look upon him, for no man could see God and live. (Basn., l. vii. ch. 15.)

‡ St. Andrew of Crete and St. George of Nicomedia



of so many nations? This is a secret between her and God; but we may reasonably suppose that never was oblation more favourably received; and St. Evodius of Antioch, St. Epiphanius of Salamina, St. Andrew of Crete, and a number of the Latin fathers, agree in regarding the consecration of the Virgin as more pleasing to God than any act of religion that man had yet accomplished.

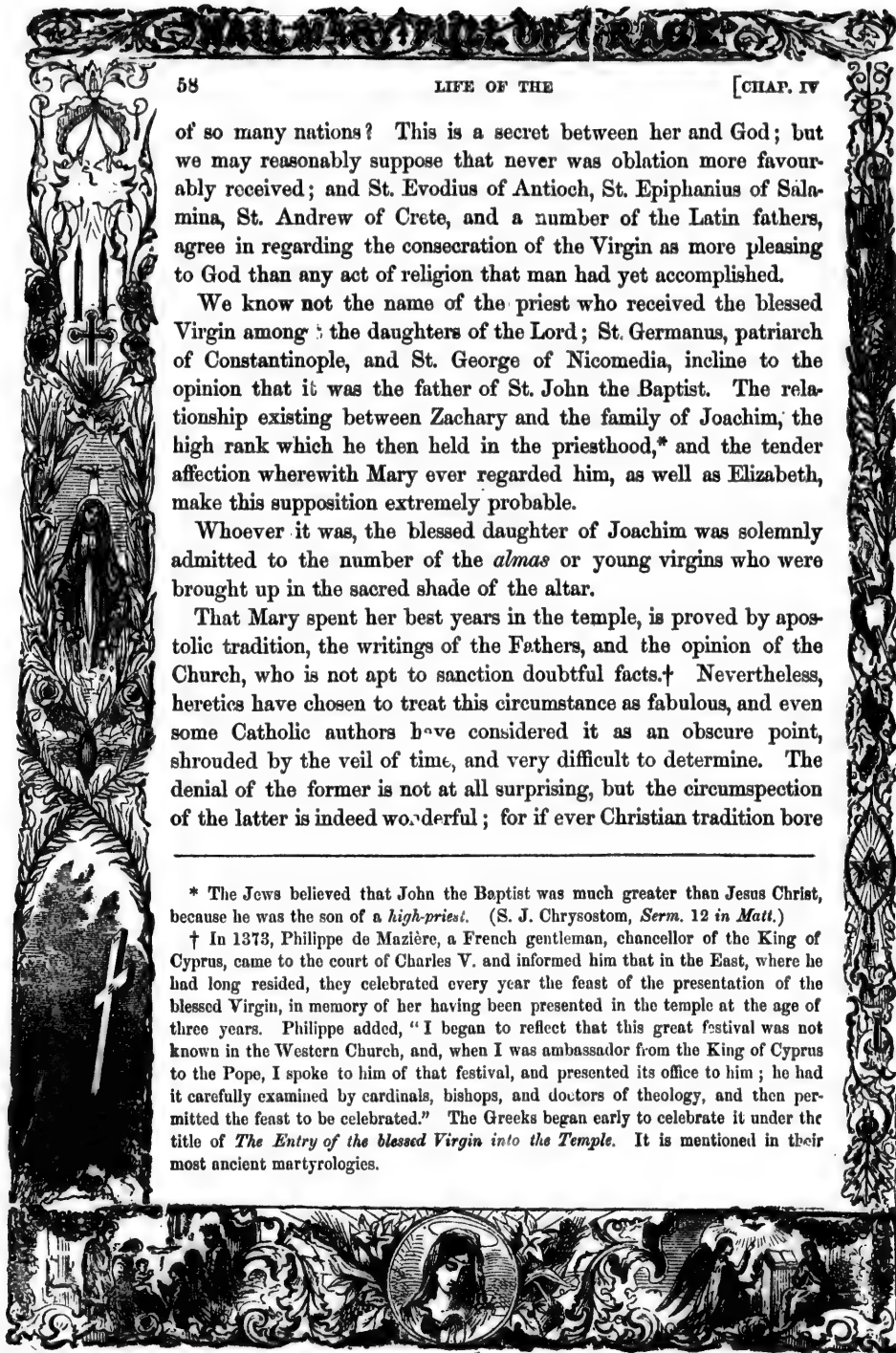
We know not the name of the priest who received the blessed Virgin among the daughters of the Lord; St. Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople, and St. George of Nicomedia, incline to the opinion that it was the father of St. John the Baptist. The relationship existing between Zachary and the family of Joachim, the high rank which he then held in the priesthood,* and the tender affection wherewith Mary ever regarded him, as well as Elizabeth, make this supposition extremely probable.

Whoever it was, the blessed daughter of Joachim was solemnly admitted to the number of the *almas* or young virgins who were brought up in the sacred shade of the altar.

That Mary spent her best years in the temple, is proved by apostolic tradition, the writings of the Fathers, and the opinion of the Church, who is not apt to sanction doubtful facts.† Nevertheless, heretics have chosen to treat this circumstance as fabulous, and even some Catholic authors have considered it as an obscure point, shrouded by the veil of time, and very difficult to determine. The denial of the former is not at all surprising, but the circumspection of the latter is indeed wonderful; for if ever Christian tradition bore

* The Jews believed that John the Baptist was much greater than Jesus Christ, because he was the son of a *high-priest*. (S. J. Chrysostom, *Serm.* 12 in *Matt.*)

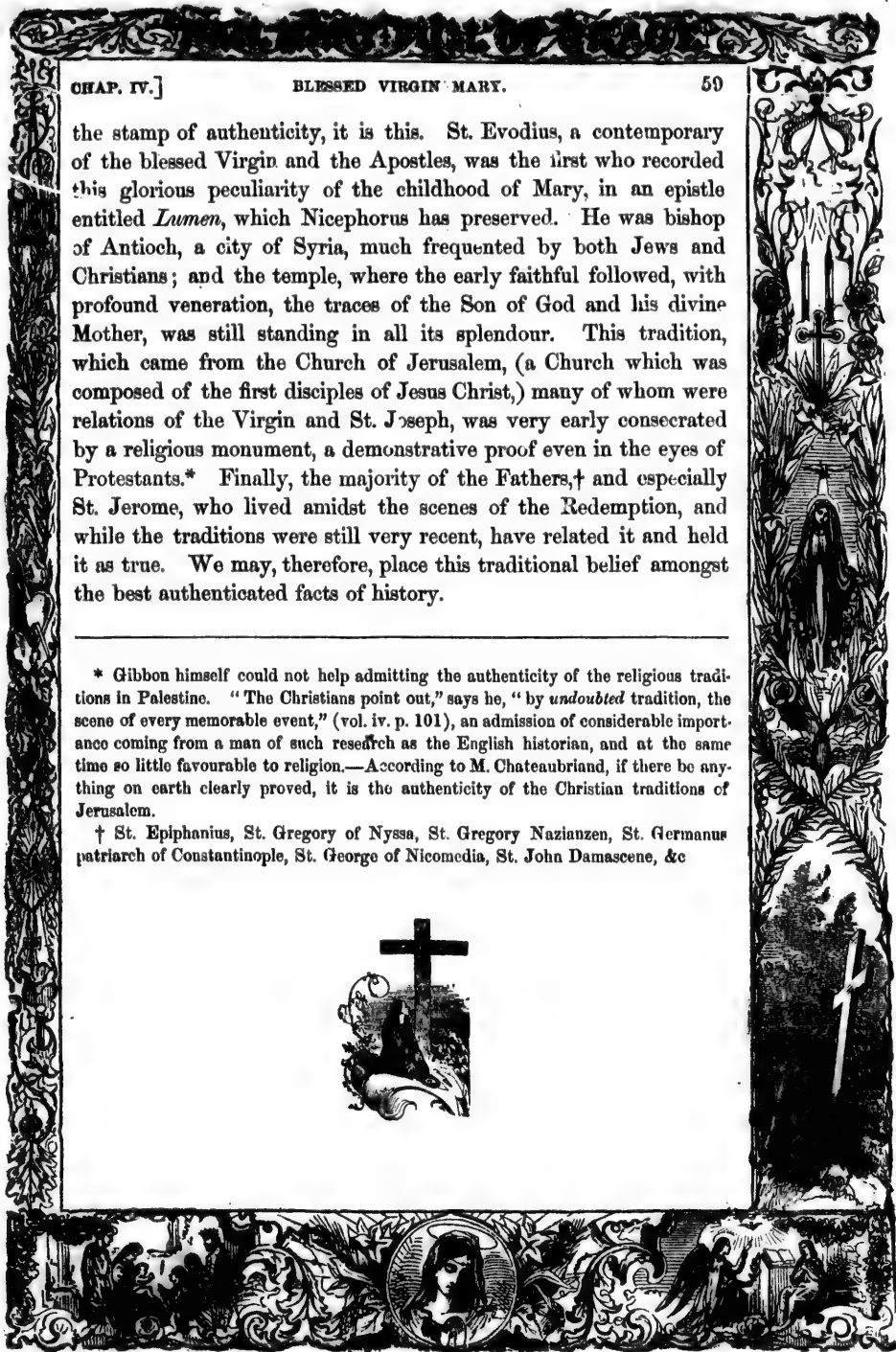
† In 1373, Philippe de Mazière, a French gentleman, chancellor of the King of Cyprus, came to the court of Charles V. and informed him that in the East, where he had long resided, they celebrated every year the feast of the presentation of the blessed Virgin, in memory of her having been presented in the temple at the age of three years. Philippe added, "I began to reflect that this great festival was not known in the Western Church, and, when I was ambassador from the King of Cyprus to the Pope, I spoke to him of that festival, and presented its office to him; he had it carefully examined by cardinals, bishops, and doctors of theology, and then permitted the feast to be celebrated." The Greeks began early to celebrate it under the title of *The Entry of the blessed Virgin into the Temple*. It is mentioned in their most ancient martyrologies.



the stamp of authenticity, it is this. St. Evodius, a contemporary of the blessed Virgin and the Apostles, was the first who recorded this glorious peculiarity of the childhood of Mary, in an epistle entitled *Lumen*, which Nicephorus has preserved. He was bishop of Antioch, a city of Syria, much frequented by both Jews and Christians; and the temple, where the early faithful followed, with profound veneration, the traces of the Son of God and his divine Mother, was still standing in all its splendour. This tradition, which came from the Church of Jerusalem, (a Church which was composed of the first disciples of Jesus Christ,) many of whom were relations of the Virgin and St. Joseph, was very early consecrated by a religious monument, a demonstrative proof even in the eyes of Protestants.* Finally, the majority of the Fathers,† and especially St. Jerome, who lived amidst the scenes of the Redemption, and while the traditions were still very recent, have related it and held it as true. We may, therefore, place this traditional belief amongst the best authenticated facts of history.

* Gibbon himself could not help admitting the authenticity of the religious traditions in Palestine. "The Christians point out," says he, "by *undoubted* tradition, the scene of every memorable event," (vol. iv. p. 101), an admission of considerable importance coming from a man of such research as the English historian, and at the same time so little favourable to religion.—According to M. Chateaubriand, if there be anything on earth clearly proved, it is the authenticity of the Christian traditions of Jerusalem.

† St. Epiphanius, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Germanus patriarch of Constantinople, St. George of Nicomedia, St. John Damascene, &c



CHAPTER V.

MARY IN THE TEMPLE.

WITHIN the fortified enclosure of the temple rose that part of the sacred edifice which was set apart for the virgins consecrated to the Lord. Thither did Zachary conduct his youthful relative.* On this site the Christians of Jerusalem erected an oratory, which was afterwards replaced by a church with a gilded dome,† by Godfrey de Bouillon's companions in arms. This church the valiant knights of the temple took pleasure in adorning with the rich spoils which they took from the Saracens.

Although virginity was, in Israel, but the virtue of a season, and was soon to give place to the conjugal duties, it was not without its honours and its special prerogatives. Jehovah delighted in the prayers of spotless children, of pure virgins; and it was a virgin rather than a queen whom he had chosen to operate the redemption of mankind.

* The mosque of Omar (*el Aksa*) represents for Christians the ancient temple of Solomon; *el sakhra* (the rock) is built on the place where Mary lived from the age of three years till her betrothal with Joseph.†... This place was at that time a dependency of the temple of Solomon, as *el sakhra* is now of the mosque of Omar. Before the crusades, *el sakhra* was but a chapel; the Franks added thereto a church, surmounted by a gilded cupola. When the victors threw down the great cross which shone on the cupola of the *sakhra*, the acclamations of the Mussulmans and the lamentations of the Christians were so great, says an Arab writer, that it seemed as though the whole world were about to be swallowed up. (*Correspondence d'Orient*, t. v.) According to Schonah, it excited so great a tumult in the city, that Saladin himself had to interfere.

† St. Germanus states that it was Zachary who took charge of the Virgin and placed her in the temple. The Arabian traditions also have it that God gave the Virgin in charge to Zachary, *ouacafalha Zacharia*. The Koran, in the *Surat* which treats of the family of Amram, adds to this fact a marvellous legend handed down amongst the Christian tribes of the desert. It says that Zachary, going now and then to visit his young relative, always found near her a quantity of the finest fruits of the Holy Land, and that, at seasons when they were not to be had, which at last induced him to ask Mary where she got all those fine fruits. Mary answered, *Hou men and Allah iarroe man iascha begair hissa*: All that you see comes from God, who provides for whosoever he will, without number and without measure (*D'Herbelot, Bibl. Orient.*, t. ii art. Miriam.)

Hence, when the seers of Juda disclosed to that chosen but often chastised people the prophetic picture of its miseries or of its triumphs, they always painted a virgin either joyous or in tears, to personify the cities and provinces. In the wars of extermination, when the broadsword of the Hebrews smote the women, the children, and the old men of Moab, the virgins were spared; and the high-priest, who was prohibited by a severe law from fulfilling the last duties to a friend *whom he loved as his own soul*, and even to the prince of his people, could assist, without contracting legal impurity, at the funeral of his sister, who died a virgin.*

The virgins, or *almas*, figured in the ceremonies of the Hebrew worship before that worship had a temple. We see them, under the guidance of Mary, the sister of Moses, celebrating by songs and dances the passage of the Red Sea.† Those dancing-choirs of young maidens, transplanted from Egypt to the desert, were long kept up amongst the Hebrews. The virgins of Silo, who seem to have been, from the time of the Judges, more especially consecrated to the service of Adonai than the other daughters of Israel, were singing canticles and dancing to the sound of the harp, within a short distance of the holy place, during a certain festival, when they were carried off by the Benjamites. But that event did not abolish the custom, which was kept up till that disastrous period when the ark was lost and the first temple destroyed.‡

It is probable that all the *almas* were admissible to those sacred choirs, when their reputation was untarnished; but there was amongst them a select number who gathered around the altar with more fervour, and more perseverance. Whilst the ark of the Lord was yet encamped under the tents, *the women who watched*

* *Levit.* ch. xxi. v. 3

† Mary and her young companions (the *almas*) sang canticles on the passage of the Red Sea, accompanying themselves with the timbrel. (*R. sal Yarahi.*) *Exod.* xv.

‡ These sacred dances, which commemorated the passage of the Red Sea, and were accompanied by hymns of praise, were regarded by the Jews as a practice so pious as to be adopted even amongst the austere therapeutæ. "The sacred dance of the devout therapeutæ," says Philo, "was composed of two choirs, one of men, the other of women; the effect of which was very musical and harmonious, because the words that were heard were very fine, and the grave and modest dancers had only in view the honour and the service of the God of Israel." (*Philo, de Vita cont.*)

and prayed at the door of the tabernacle, offered to God the brazen mirrors which they had brought from Egypt. These were probably pious widows who had refused to contract new ties, in order to apply themselves more constantly to heavenly things, and *almas* devoted by their parents to the service of the sanctuary, who had been placed under the care of those righteous matrons. St. Jerome thus understands this passage of Exodus:

As the vow of the parents was usually redeemable, and the ransom, fixed at a moderate sum,* always took place after the expiration of a few years,† these temporary vows were called a loan given to the Lord.‡ *I have lent him to the Lord*, said Anna, as she conducted her young Samuel to Silo.§

After the return from captivity, the influence of the Persians operated against the institution of the *almas*, as that people excluded women from their religious celebrations.¶ They ceased to form, as it were, a body in the state, and to figure ostensibly in the public worship. Under the pontiff-kings they lived shut up, and their days flowed on in such profound seclusion, that when they ran in terror to the high-priest Onias, at the moment when the sacrilegious crime of Heliodorus threw all Jerusalem into confusion, the fact was considered so unusual and so remarkable, that the Jewish historians give it a place in their annals.¶

* Moses had, by a special law, fixed the redemption of this vow at a sum of fifty shekels or more. The shekel of silver was, at least, four Attic drachms.

† Children in this sort of bondage retained their rights to the paternal inheritance, and might redeem themselves, in case they were not redeemed by their parents. (*Abbé Guenée*.) Josephus (*Ant.*, b. iv.) remarks that those men and women who, after having voluntarily consecrated themselves to the ministry, wished to break their vows, paid the priests a certain sum, and that those who were insolvent placed themselves at the disposal of the priest.

‡ Père Croiset, *Exerc. de Piété*.

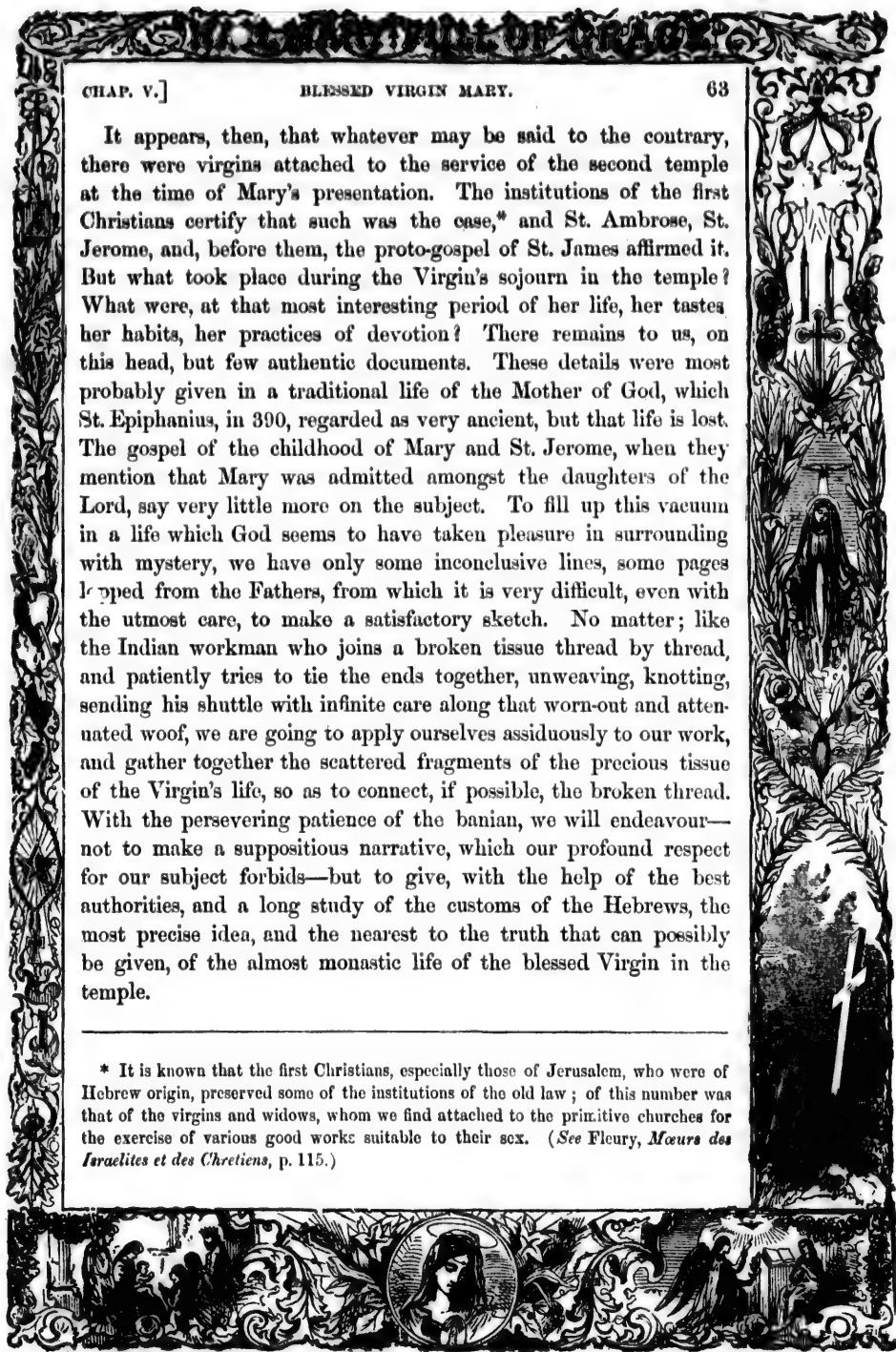
§ *Idcirco et ego commodavi eum Domino*.

¶ In Bombay, the descendants of the Persians have a temple consecrated to the fire. They come in crowds to the esplanade, with their snow-white garments and coloured turbans, to salute the rising sun or to offer their homage to his departing rays, humbly prostrating themselves before him. Their women do not then appear, for it is at that time that they go to fetch water from the wells. (*Buckingham, Tableau de l'Inde*.)

¶ II. Mac. iii.

It appears, then, that whatever may be said to the contrary, there were virgins attached to the service of the second temple at the time of Mary's presentation. The institutions of the first Christians certify that such was the case,* and St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, and, before them, the proto-gospel of St. James affirmed it. But what took place during the Virgin's sojourn in the temple? What were, at that most interesting period of her life, her tastes, her habits, her practices of devotion? There remains to us, on this head, but few authentic documents. These details were most probably given in a traditional life of the Mother of God, which St. Epiphanius, in 390, regarded as very ancient, but that life is lost. The gospel of the childhood of Mary and St. Jerome, when they mention that Mary was admitted amongst the daughters of the Lord, say very little more on the subject. To fill up this vacuum in a life which God seems to have taken pleasure in surrounding with mystery, we have only some inconclusive lines, some pages leaped from the Fathers, from which it is very difficult, even with the utmost care, to make a satisfactory sketch. No matter; like the Indian workman who joins a broken tissue thread by thread, and patiently tries to tie the ends together, unweaving, knotting, sending his shuttle with infinite care along that worn-out and attenuated woof, we are going to apply ourselves assiduously to our work, and gather together the scattered fragments of the precious tissue of the Virgin's life, so as to connect, if possible, the broken thread. With the persevering patience of the banian, we will endeavour—not to make a suppositious narrative, which our profound respect for our subject forbids—but to give, with the help of the best authorities, and a long study of the customs of the Hebrews, the most precise idea, and the nearest to the truth that can possibly be given, of the almost monastic life of the blessed Virgin in the temple.

* It is known that the first Christians, especially those of Jerusalem, who were of Hebrew origin, preserved some of the institutions of the old law; of this number was that of the virgins and widows, whom we find attached to the primitive churches for the exercise of various good works suitable to their sex. (*See Fleury, Mœurs des Israélites et des Chrétiens*, p. 115.)



Many of the old legendary writers took pleasure in surrounding the childhood of Mary with a multitude of prodigies. These we pass over in silence, because they are not sufficiently authenticated. But there is one thing which we cannot omit to mention, viz., an inaccurate, or rather an inadmissible assertion, which has been adopted credulously and without examination by some holy personages and religious writers.* From the fact that the Virgin was always sanctity itself, which no one disputes, they inferred that she must have been placed in the most sanctified part of the temple, which is materially false. The HOLY OF HOLIES, that impenetrable sanctuary of the God of Hosts, was closed to the whole Hebrew priesthood except the high-priest, who entered it but once a year, after much fasting, watching, and purification. He only presented himself there in the midst of a thick cloud of incense, which interposed between him and the Divinity, *whom no man can see and live*, says the Scripture. Finally, he remained there but a few minutes, while the people, prostrate on the ground, sobbed and wept, fearing lest he should meet his death. He himself afterwards gave a grand banquet to his friends, to rejoice with them for having escaped such imminent and fearful danger.†

From this we may judge whether it be possible that Mary was brought up in the HOLY OF HOLIES.

The local traditions of Jerusalem, no less loudly than common sense, protest against this rash opinion. The *sakhra*, which was first a Christian church, built on the site of the apartments of the Virgin, is distinctly detached from the mosque of Omar; yet the mosque of Omar is built on the very ground of the temple.

Father Croiset, in his *Exercices de Piété*, did not adopt this opinion; but, unwilling to reject it altogether, he attempted a sort of compromise. According to him, the Mother of God was not brought up in the HOLY OF HOLIES, but the priests, touched by her admirable virtues, permitted her to pray there from time to time. The Jesuit Father, in adopting this *mezzo termine*, has forgotten several things: first, that amongst the Hebrews, woman

* St. Andrew of Crete, St. George of Nicomedia, &c.

† Vrideaux.—Basnage, *Histoire des Suisses*, l. v. ch. 15.

was considered an unclean creature, assimilated to the slave, and scarcely bound to pray;* that she was banished to an inclosure whose boundaries she might not cross, and that the interior of the temple was to her a forbidden place, even though she were a prophetess or the daughter of a king; the second is, that the priests could not grant to Mary a privilege which they did not themselves enjoy, and which would, moreover, have exposed her to certain death;† finally, that even supposing the priests of Jehovah to have been without these fears and prejudices, they would by no means have suffered any one to penetrate to the HOLY OF HOLIES, seeing that it was important to conceal from the people the disappearance of the ark, lost in some obscure grotto of the mountains since the days of Jeremiah.‡

This second version, then, is not more admissible than the first.

The education which Mary received in the temple was the best that those times and the customs of the Hebrews permitted. It was chiefly confined to the domestic labours, from which even the wife and daughter of Cæsar Augustus did not exempt themselves in

* The uncleanness of the woman, according to the Jewish doctors, dates from the seduction of Eve by the serpent, and is only to be extirpated at the coming of their Messiah. Her prayer is not so obligatory as that of man, and she is not even bound to the observance of most of the affirmative commandments. Finally, the Jews still say, in their morning prayer, *Blessed be thou, O Lord, King of the universe, for thou hast not made me a woman.* Woman, on the other hand, said, in her humility, *Blessed be thou, O Lord, who hast made me according to thine own will.* (Basu, *Histoire des Juifs*, l. vii. ch. 10.)

† "The sanctuary," says Philo, "is so holy a place, that none amongst us, save the high-priest, is permitted to penetrate there, and even he only once a year, after a solemn fast, to burn perfumes in honour of God, and humbly to beg of Him that the year may be favourable for all men. If any one, even a prince of our nation, dared to enter, or if the high-priest himself went in a second time in one year, or more than once on the day that he is permitted to do so, it would cost either of them his life, without any chance of escape, so strict was the ordinance of Moses, our legislator, concerning the veneration of the temple. (Philo, *ad Cajum*, c. 16.)

‡ The Jews do not agree concerning the fate of the ark after the ruin of the first temple. Some will have it, that Jeremiah concealed it in a cavern of the mountains, the entrance to which was never found; others say that the holy king Josias, warned by Holda, the prophetess, that the temple should be destroyed shortly after his death, caused that precious deposit to be placed in a subterraneous vault, which had been constructed by Solomon.

their imperial palace and amid the delights of Rome.* Brought up in the strict observance of the Mosaic law, and conforming herself to the customs of her people, Mary arose with the lark, at the hour *when wicked spirits are silent, and when prayers are most favourably heard.*† She dressed herself with the greatest modesty, through respect for the glory of God who is every where present, and beholds all the actions of men, even through the gloom of the darkest night. At the same time, she gave thanks to the Lord for having added another day to her life, and for having preserved her during her sleep from the snares of the evil one.‡ Her toilet was extremely simple, and occupied but little time. She wore neither bracelets of pearl, nor chains of gold *inlaid with silver*, nor purple tunics, such as were worn by the daughters of the princes of her race. A robe of celestial blue, a white tunic, confined at the waist by a cincture with flowing ends, a long veil, simply but gracefully arranged, so as completely to cover the face when necessary; these, with a species of shoe corresponding to the robe, composed the oriental costume of Mary.§

After the customary ablutions, the Virgin and her young companions, with certain pious women who were answerable to the priests and to God for that sacred deposit, took their way towards the gallery|

* Augustus wore no other garments than those which were spun by his wife or daughter, and Alexander the Great by his mother and sisters.

† Basnage, l. vii. ch. 17, p. 308.

‡ Basnage, *place quoted*.

§ The *Annunciade* of Genoa wore, in the sixteenth century, the costume of the blessed Virgin, that is to say, *white under and blue over, in order that such dress might continually remind them of her. The slippers of the choristers are also composed of blue leather.* (*Rule of the Annunciade of Genoa*, ch. 2.) M. de Lamarine found in that Eastern land, where nothing seems to change, that the costume of the women of Nazareth is still that which was worn by Mary. "They wear," says he, "a long tunic of celestial blue, confined by a white cincture, the ends of which reach the ground; the soft folds of a white tunic fall gracefully over the blue." M. de Lamarine traces this costume to the time of Abraham and Isaac, and his supposition is not at all improbable. We see that there is but a very trifling difference between the costume adopted in the sixteenth century, from the traditions of Italy, and that which the French traveller has found in the Holy Land.

|| During the feast of the drawing of water, the men were placed under the galleries which surround the women's *peistyle*.

where the *almes* sat in the place of honour.* The sun began to gild with his radiant beams the distant mountains of Arabia, the eagle cut circles in the clouds above, the sacrifice burned on the brazen altar to the sound of the morning trumpets, when Mary, her head bowed down beneath her veil, after repeating the eighteen prayers of Esdras, demanded of God, with all Israel, that CHRIST, so long promised and so tardy in appearing—

"Let thy name, O God! be praised and glorified in this world, which thou hast created according to thy good pleasure; *vouchsafe to establish thy reign (fautes régner votre règne)*; let redemption flourish, and the Messiah quickly come."†

And the people, in chorus, responded, "Amen! Amen!"

Then were sung the concluding verses of that beautiful psalm attributed to the prophets Aggeus and Zacharias.

"The Lord unbinds those who are fettered; the Lord enlightens those who are blind

"The Lord upraises those who are crushed down; the Lord loves those who are, just.

"The Lord has care over strangers; he will protect the widow and the orphan, and the ways of sinners he will destroy.

"The Lord shall reign for ever and ever; thy God, O Sion! shall rule the nations."‡

The reading of the *schema*§ and the blessing of the priest terminated this public prayer, which took place every morning and evening.¶

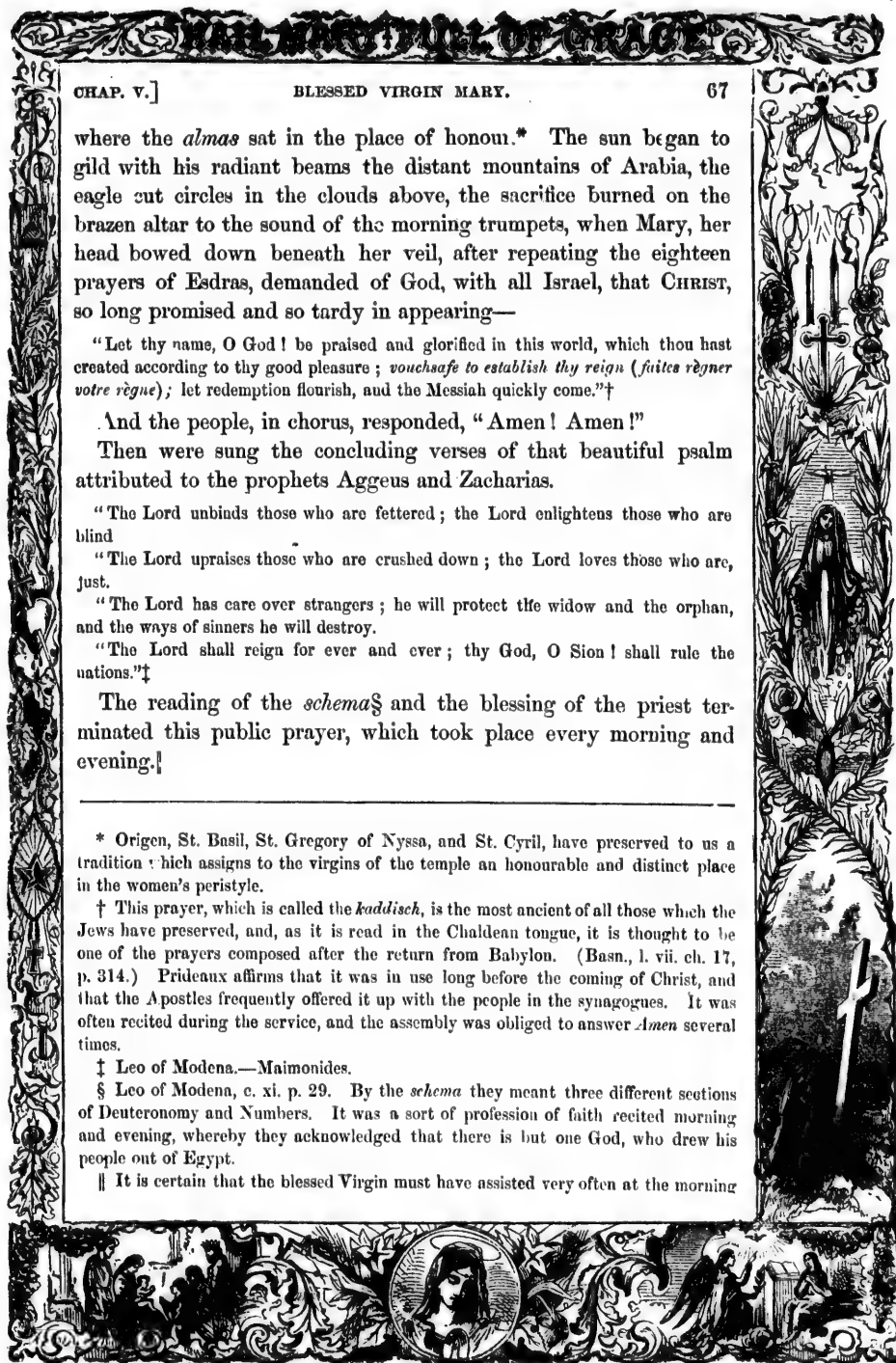
* Origen, St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Cyril, have preserved to us a tradition which assigns to the virgins of the temple an honourable and distinct place in the women's peristyle.

† This prayer, which is called the *kaddisch*, is the most ancient of all those which the Jews have preserved, and, as it is read in the Chaldean tongue, it is thought to be one of the prayers composed after the return from Babylon. (Basn., l. vii. ch. 17, p. 314.) Prideaux affirms that it was in use long before the coming of Christ, and that the Apostles frequently offered it up with the people in the synagogues. It was often recited during the service, and the assembly was obliged to answer *Amen* several times.

‡ Leo of Modena.—Maimonides.

§ Leo of Modena, c. xi. p. 29. By the *schema* they meant three different sections of Deuteronomy and Numbers. It was a sort of profession of faith recited morning and evening, whereby they acknowledged that there is but one God, who drew his people out of Egypt.

¶ It is certain that the blessed Virgin must have assisted very often at the morning



Having fulfilled, with indescribable fervour, this first religious duty, Mary and her young companions resumed their wonted avocations. Some rapidly twirled in their agile fingers spindles of cedar or of *ithel*;* others embroidered the veil of the temple, or the rich cinctures of the priests, with purple, blue, and gold; whilst groups, bent forward over a Sidonian loom, applied themselves to the execution of those magnificent carpets which won for "the strong woman" the admiration of all Israel, and were extolled by Homer himself.† The Virgin surpassed all the daughters of her people in those beautiful fabrications so highly prized by the ancients. We learn from St. Epiphanius that she excelled in embroidery and the art of working in wool, in byssus, and in gold.‡ The proto-gospel of St. James represents her seated before a distaff of purple wool, which moved under her taper fingers like the trembling leaf of the poplar;§ and the Christians of the West have perpetuated the traditional opinion of her unrivalled skill in spinning the flax of Pelusia,|| by giving the name of *Virgin's thread* to that net-work of dazzling whiteness, and of almost vaporous texture, which floats over deep valleys in the damp mornings of autumn. The chaste and modest brides of the early Christians, in memory of these domestic avocations of the Queen of Angels, never failed to consecrate to her a distaff adorned with fillets of purple, and charged with spotless wool.¶

and evening service. Those prayers were considered more efficacious than any others, and some of the Hebrew doctors even maintain that God hears none but these.

* The *ithel* is a species of acacia which grows in Arabia; it is of a beautiful black, resembling ebony; it is thought to be the setim wood of Moses.

† See the *Iliad*, b. vi.

‡ In the middle ages, in commemoration of the Virgin's works in flax, weavers were ranged under the banner of the Annunciation. The makers of gold brocade and silken stuffs had for their patroness *Notre Dame la Riche*, (*Our Lady the Rich*), and bore her image on their banner, heavy with superb embroidery. (Alex. Monteil, *Histoire des Français des divers états*.)

§ The Church of Jerusalem early consecrated this remembrance by ranking amongst its treasures the spindles of Mary. Those spindles were subsequently sent to the Empress Pulcheria, who placed them in the Church of the Guides in Constantinople.

|| The garments worn in the morning by the chief priests were, says the Mishnah, of the fine flax of Pelusia, a city of Egypt famous for the excellent quality of its flax.

¶ This custom is still kept up in some hamlets in the north and west of France.

But the talents and acquirements of the Virgin did not end here. St. Ambrose ascribes to her a perfect understanding of Holy Writ, and St. Anselm will have it that she was thoroughly acquainted with the old Hebrew, the language of the terrestrial paradise,* in which God himself traced, on *tables composed of precious stones*,† the ten precepts of the Decalogue. Whether Mary, studying the idiom of Anna and of Deborah, became conversant, during her solitary vigils, with the lofty conceptions of the *seers* of Israel, or that she received from the sanctifying Spirit, who had so richly endowed her, a breath of poetic inspiration, like the harmonious breezes which swept the Æolian harp of the Royal Prophet,‡ it must be acknowledged that the youthful prophetess, who gave to the new law its finest canticle, could not have been a stranger to the sweetest or the most sublime inspirations of genius. Undoubtedly, the woman who composed the *Magnificat* was not a mere common girl, as some Protestant authors have not hesitated to assert, and must have united to unequalled sanctity talents of the highest order. But then this brilliant aspect of her character was scarcely perceptible so carefully did she cover it with her angelic modesty. Knowing the delicate duties and the real interests of her sex, she shrank from all display, and passed silently along the way of life, like some fair star gliding through the clouds. The rich treasures of her mind and heart were but partially revealed on earth; they were as the roses of Yemen which the Arab maiden conceals beneath her veil, and whose gentle perfume is scarcely felt.

An ancient poet said servilely to Augustus that he alone was the

* According to the Rabbins and the Commentators on the Bible, the language of Paradise was the ancient Hebrew

† A Hebrew tradition, (Basn., vi. ch. 16.) According to some Oriental writers, the tables of the law were either of rubies or carbuncles; but the most common opinion, amongst the Arabs and Mussulmans, is, that they were of emeralds, within which the characters were cut, so that they could be read on every side. (D'Hervelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale*, t. ii.)

‡ According to the ancient Jewish tradition, David had a harp which played by night when a *certain wind* came to blow. Basnage ridicules the idea of chords, which only echo to the night wind, and plainly sets it down as an absurdity. The invention, or rather the re-invention of Æolian harps, whose magic sounds enchant the English parks, gives probability to the statement of the Rabbins.

work of several centuries, and that, ever since the creation, all the industry of nature had been employed in producing him. That which was an outrageous hyperbole in speaking of the sanguinary nephew of Cæsar, becomes a demonstrated truth when applied to the Virgin. In reality, Mary is the masterpiece of Nature, the flower of the ancient days, and the wonder of ages. Never has the earth seen, and never will it again see, so many perfections re-united in a mere mortal. In that blessed creature all was grace, sanctity, and grandeur. Conceived in the friendship of God, sanctified before her birth, she knew nothing of the passions which agitate the soul, or the sin which corrupts the heart. Having a sweet and natural inclination to virtue, thanks to her immaculate conception, her pure and innocent acts were like the wreath of snow which silently falls on the mountain-top, adding purity to purity and whiteness to whiteness, till it rears itself into a shining cone, which attracts the rays of the sun and dazzles the eye of man. It has not been given to any other creature to present such a life to the Sovereign Judge of men. Jesus Christ alone surpassed her; but Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Mary entered the Temple of Jerusalem like one of those unspotted victims shown by the Spirit of the Lord to Malachi. Young, beautiful, nobly born, and qualified to aspire to the highest place amongst a people who often raised beauty to the throne,* she bound herself to the horns of the altar by a vow of virginity which her infant lips could barely articulate, and which her heart subsequently ratified, with a perfect renunciation of the pomps and vanities of the world. By that vow, till then unheard, Mary crossed the boundary which divides the old law from the new, and plunged so deep into the sea of evangelical virtues, that one might think she had already sounded its depths when her divine Son came to reveal it to the children of men.

* It is certain that David, Solomon, and the other kings of Juda, often took to their royal bed women of obscure condition; the famous Sulamite of Solomon was, it is said, a young country girl from the little village of Sulam, situated at a short distance from Jerusalem. In the time of Mary, Herod the Great espoused Mariamne, the daughter of a priest, because of her beauty



God does not alter his course abruptly. He announces, he prepares long beforehand the great events which are to change the aspect of the world. A precursor was required for the Messiah, and he found one in the person of St. John the Baptist. A preliminary was required for the new law, and the virtues of Mary were to the Gospel what the fresh and roseate dawn is to the risen day.

St. Epiphanius, cited by Nicephorus, has left us a charming description of the Virgin. That portrait, traced in the fourth century from traditions now lost, and manuscripts which are no longer in existence, is yet the only one which remains to us.

The Virgin, according to this holy bishop, was not of tall stature, though somewhat above the middle height; her face was of that fine oval which characterizes the Jewish women, and her eyes were of a soft hazel colour. Her person was, in fine, a casket worthy of the priceless jewel it contained, and was like it *all beautiful*.

All the Fathers agree as to the admirable beauty of the Virgin St. Denis the Areopagite, who had seen the divine Mary, assures us *that she was of dazzling beauty, and that he would have worshipped her as a goddess had he not known that there is but one God*.

But it was not to this assemblage of physical perfections that Mary owed the power of her beauty; it emanated from a higher source. This was well understood by St. Ambrose when he said that her charming exterior was but a transparent veil which disclosed all her virtues; and that her soul, the noblest and the purest that ever was, after the soul of Jesus Christ, revealed itself fully in her look. The physical beauty of Mary was but the distant reflection of her intellectual and imperishable beauty; she was the fairest, because she was the purest and holiest, of the daughters of Eve.*

God has encased the Green Sea pearl in a mother-of-pearl shell,† but it is the pearl and not its brilliant case that men set in gold

* It is neither climate, nor food, nor bodily exercise, which forms human beauty; it is the moral sentiment of virtue, which cannot subsist without religion. The beauty of the countenance is the true index of the soul (Bernardine de St Pierre, *Etudes de la Nature*, étude 10.)

† *Bahr-al-Akhdhar*, one of the names of the Persian Gulf.



and place in the diadem of kings. The Fathers were well aware of this, and, in their glowing descriptions of Mary's loveliness, they dwelt particularly on the charms of her mind, those which belong not to the earth, and perish not with the frail body. We are about to collect the gems scattered here and there throughout their works, to form them into a mosaic, which may present a second portrait of her who was, as Sophronius says, *a garden of pleasure to the Lord*.*

The greatest decorum reigned in all the actions of the Virgin. She was kind, affable, compassionate, and never tired of hearing the complaints of the wretched. She spoke little, always to the purpose, and never did falsehood defile her lips. Her voice was mild and penetrating, and her words had in them something unctuous and soothing, which infused peace into the soul. She was the first in vigils, the most exact in fulfilling the divine law, the most profound in humility, the most perfect in every virtue. She was never seen in anger; never offended, annoyed, or rebuked any one. She was averse to all pomp, simple in her apparel, simple in her manners, and never once thought of turning to account either her beauty, her noble birth, or the rich treasures of her mind and heart. Her presence seemed to sanctify all around, and the very sight of her was sufficient to detach the mind from earthly things. Her politeness was not an idle formula, consisting of empty words; it was an expansion of universal beneficence proceeding from her inmost soul. In fine, her look already denoted the Mother of Mercy, the Virgin of whom it has been since said, "*She would even ask pardon of God for Lucifer, if Lucifer would ask it for himself*."

Although she had but little of this world's wealth, yet Mary was bountiful towards the poor, and her childish alms fell often unperceived into the poor-box attached to one of the pillars of the peristyle; the same into which Jesus, in after-times, saw the widow drop her mite. St. Ambrose reveals the pure and sacred source whence Mary derived her alms. She deprived herself of all, granted nothing to nature but barely what was necessary for

* *Vere Virgo erat hortus deliciarum in quo consita sunt universa florum genera et odoramenta virtutum.* (Sophro., *Serm. de Ass.*)



preserving life, and seemed to live, like the grasshopper, on air and dew.* Her frequent and rigorous fasts were also made profitable to the poor. The fasts observed by the Virgin were not like our northern fasts, which last but for a single morning, and are confined to the abstaining from certain kinds of food; it was a total abstinence from all things, which began at sunset and continued the whole of the next day till the stars were in the sky.† During that time, Mary deprived herself of every thing that might gratify her taste or her appetite. She imposed on herself the hardest labour, the most disgusting works of mercy, clothed herself in her meanest garments, slept on the bare ground, and allowed herself nothing during this time of penance and mortification (often prolonged for whole weeks) but a light repast composed of bread baked under the ashes, some bitter vegetables, and a cup of water from the fountain of Siloë.‡ Her meditations were frequent, and her prayer so collected, so attentive, so profound, that her soul seemed to melt in adoration before the Eternal God. The roar of the tempest and the crash of the thunder, which drove Cæsar to the subterraneous vaults of his palace,§ reached not the ear of the youthful Virgin; completely absorbed in her religious duties, her soul was at the feet of the great Author of the universe, far beyond the confines of the world and the region of storms. "Never was any one endowed," says St. Ambrose, "with a more sublime gift of contemplation."

* The ancients believed that the grasshoppers lived on air and dew. (Philo, *de Vita cont.*, p. 831.) Homer, *third book of the Iliad*: "Like the grasshoppers which, perched on the top of the forest-trees, send forth their harmonious strains (after having drunk a little dew)." "The grasshoppers feed only on dew." (Theocrit. idyl 4.) "Does he feed only on dew like the grasshopper?" And Virgil:

Dum thymo pascuntur apes, dum rore cicadæ.

"Whilst the bees shall feed on thyme and the grasshoppers on dew." Hence it was that Callimachus called the dew "*the grasshopper's food*."

† The Jews considered that no fast on which the sun did not set

‡ Basnage, l. vii., ch. 18. Fleury, *Mœurs des Israélites*, p. 104.

§ Augustus, if we may believe Suetonius, was as much afraid of thunder and lightning as any female could be. At the slightest appearance of a storm, he went and hid himself in the deepest vaults, whither the noise of the thunder and the glare of the lightning could not penetrate.



Her mind, ever in accordance with her heart, never lost sight of Him whom she loved more ardently than all the seraphim put together. Her whole life was but a continual exercise of the purest love of her God, and, when sleep weighed down her eyelids, her heart still watched and prayed.*

Such were the virtues, such the occupations of Mary in the temple. She shone amongst her young companions like a rich diamond which, placed amidst other precious stones, effaces them all by its splendour. Hence it was that men who had grown gray in the priesthood never passed her without a murmured blessing, and considered her as the fairest ornament of the holy house.

CHAPTER VI.

MARY, AN ORPHAN.

It must be admitted—though it is a strange thing—that the history of the Virgin is barren of facts and full of gaps. It may be likened to the majestic remains of some ancient city of the desert. Here, gigantic columns standing firm as the mountains; there, porticoes which the Arab, in his love of the marvellous, proclaims as the work of genii; farther on, temples buried in the sand which the imagination delights to raise again; and then, here and there, a bleak and sterile area, without a single blade of grass for the camel of the Bedouin. In default of the Apostles, who were too much occupied, it would seem, with the grand figure of Christ to think of his earthly relatives, the Fathers have made us acquainted with the virtues of St. Ann. We follow them into her humble dwelling; we behold her piety, we hear her vows and her fervent prayers; we witness the joys of her late maternity, and the outpouring of her gratitude; but there the thread of

* St Ambrose, *de Virg.* l. ii.

tradition becomes so frail that it incessantly snaps asunder, and the remainder of St. Ann's life is almost entirely conjectural. That mother, who had obtained her blessed daughter after so many fasts and tears, who had so lovingly watched over her infancy, who had brought her in her arms to the Lord,* and had laid her weeping in his sanctuary, reappears but for a moment on the scene, and that only to die. It is, however, very unlikely that the wife of Joachim would have remained nine years without seeing her child again. The outer buildings of the temple, where the consecrated children were brought up, could not have been closed against their mothers. The rights of a mother are both sacred and religious: all nations declare them to be imprescriptible; and, moreover, the Scripture tells us that Anna, wife of Elcana, freely visited her son at Silo, on solemn days, and that she never failed to bring a tunic spun by her own hands to the young prophet, whom she had *lent* to the Lord. Anna had had, after the birth of Samuel, several children, whom she beheld growing up around her like olive-trees, and who shared with the young servant of the tabernacle her maternal solicitude. St. Ann had none but Mary;† that dear child was, therefore, the sum of her happiness, the hope of her old days, and the source of her earthly joy. It is, then, almost certain that, in company with her husband, she came to see her as often as her piety drew her to the temple, and that she also sat up, by the light of her lamp or the silvery radiance of the moon,‡ to spin the virginal robes of her child.

It is thought that St. Joachim and St. Ann returned to their home after the presentation of Mary, and that they remained there for some years before their final settlement in Jerusalem. Joachim, who was not an artisan like Joseph, seems to have cultivated the

* Liguori, *Glories of Mary*, discourse iii., p. 59

† It has been said that St. Ann had another daughter of the name of Mary, born twenty years before the blessed Virgin; this tradition has not been accepted by the Church.

‡ The Jewish women spun together in the summer evenings by the light of the moon, since the Jewish doctors authorize a husband to put away his wife when slandered by the women who were spinning by moonlight. (*Sotah*, c. 6, p. 250.) This custom of spinning by moonlight is still kept up in many southern countries



small patrimony which he had inherited, and enjoyed that happy mediocrity for which sages and poets have ever sighed when weary of the great world.* Churches have been erected in Sephoris, in Nazareth, and in Jerusalem, on sites which had formed part of his inheritance. But the vineyard, or farm of his fathers, must have been in the vicinity of Sephoris; hence his return to Lower Galilee. Joachim was a true Israelite, strongly attached to the law of Moses. He went to the temple on every solemn festival with his wife and some of their kinsfolk, according to the custom of the Hebrews, and it is likely that the desire of seeing his daughter made him still more eager to visit the temple. How joyfully did his good and pious spouse set out for the Holy City! How endless did the way appear, as she beheld it winding far and away over hill and dale! Looking eagerly forward, she passed a score of times in imagination before she reached them in reality, the nopal bushes, the thickets of rose-bay, the clumps of oak or sycamore which marked the road; for, each of these points gained, she was so much nearer her daughter—her daughter, the gift of the Lord, the child of miracle—she whom an angel had announced as the glory of Israel! With what emotion did she hail, from the depth of the valley, that tower of Antonia rising proud and menacing on its base of polished marble,† to protect the house of prayer! and how her holy and tender heart must have throbbed at the sight of that temple which contained her child and her God!

When evening came, and the sacerdotal trumpets summoned the people to the ceremony,‡ Ann hastened to adore God, and catch a glimpse of her daughter, whom she had not seen for months long.

* According to St. Gregory of Nyssa, the father of the Blessed Virgin was an honourable citizen, God-fearing, and of singular piety. Father de Valverde states, on the testimony of some of the Fathers of the Church, that Ann and Joachim, being in easy circumstances, gave one part of their savings to the temple and the other to the needy. (*Vie de Jésus Christ*, t. i., p. 46.)

† The tower of Antonia might be considered as the citadel of the temple; it was of old the palace of the Asmonian princes. The rock on which it was seated was fifty cubits high, and inaccessible on all sides. Herod had this rock covered with marble from base to summit, so that no one could either go up or down (*Joseph., Ant. Jud., l. xv., ch. 14, and de Bello, l. ii., ch. 16.*)

‡ The religious festivals of the Jews began always in the evening.





The court-yard had no other covering than the sky, and the dazzling radiance of its candelabras* mingled with the glimmering light of the tans. Thousands of lights were gleaming beneath the porticoes, garlands of fresh flowers were wreathed around the pillars,† and the chief priests walked through the crowd with their splendid ornaments, brought from Indian lands by the caravans of Palmyra.‡ Now and then the chords of the harp seemed to accompany the murmurs of prayer, which, like the voice of many waters,§ went up from that multitude of Hebrews assembled from the banks of the Nile, the Euphrates, and the Tiber, to bend the knee before the only altar of their fathers' God.¶ In the midst of this immense concourse of native and foreign believers, Ann, absorbed in prayer, raised her head but for a moment; it was when Mary and her young companions passed, veiled and robed in white, with lamps in their hands, like the wise virgins of the gospel.

The festival over, Ann, after having blessed and embraced Mary, took, with Joachim, her homeward way through the mountains; slowly did she depart from Jerusalem, not daring to cast a look behind, and bearing with her a fund of happiness and of joyous reminiscences for all the time that was to elapse before the next festival.

When years and toil had exhausted Joachim's strength, so that he was no longer able to cultivate his ground, he began to think of moving nearer to his daughter. Accordingly, he and his spouse

* These candelabras were of gold, and fifty cubits high. The light which they shed, say the Rabbins (who are noted for exaggeration), was seen at an incredible distance from Jerusalem, while within the city the houses were so well lit that cooks could pick the grain for their pottage, without the assistance of their lamps. (*Talmud, tract. Lucca*, fol. 3.)

† These green wreaths were used during the feast of Tabernacles. (Basn., l. vii., ch. 16.)

‡ The garments worn in the evening by the priests on solemn festivals came from India, and cost very dear. (Basn. l. vii., ch. 15.)

§ It is well known that the Jews and the Arabs pray aloud.

¶ So long as the temple stood, the Jews made a special devotion of visiting it. More than eleven hundred thousand persons perished in the destruction of Jerusalem, under Titus, because they were assembled for the feast of the Passover when the city was besieged. (Joseph., *de Bello*, l. vii., ch. 17.)

bade a last farewell to Lower Galilee, and took up their abode in Jerusalem, in the neighbourhood of the temple. Ann was then at the summit of her wishes; she could serve the Lord in his holy house, and see her daughter frequently. How often, during the fine evenings of summer, as she sat spinning before her door, would she whirl her spindle mechanically, whilst her maternal glance was pensively fixed on the glittering roof of the temple! *Where a man's treasure is, says the Holy Scripture, there is his heart.*

St. Ann might have shortened the duration of that painful separation, as the law of Moses accepted compensations. This would not do; her gratitude to God spoke still louder than her maternal tenderness, and when the voice of religion made itself heard that of nature became silent.

The Virgin had been nine years shut up in the temple* when the first dark cloud obscured her young life. Her beloved father, Joachim the Just, fell dangerously ill, and the symptoms of approaching dissolution very soon appeared. Apprehensive for his life, his friends and kinsfolk crowded around, with every manifestation of kindness and sympathy; for the families of Juda were closely united amongst themselves, and lived in the utmost harmony. The dying man smiled benignly on his friends and neighbours. Like Jacob, he had been long a wanderer on the earth, and it gave him little concern that the wind of death came to beat down his tent, for, beyond this earthly planet, he saw in spirit those blissful regions where he was going to repose for ever in Abraham's bosom.

When his increasing weakness gave him to understand that life was ebbing fast away, the holy old man confessed his sins aloud, in presence of all, according to the custom of the Hebrews,†

* Père Croiset, *Exercices de Piété*, t. xviii. p. 59.

† The Hebrew confession is from all antiquity; the Jews made it, at the article of death, not merely aloud, but *before ten persons and a Rabbi*. Aaron ben Berachia, in his book entitled *Maavar Jobbok*, treating of the art of dying well and the assistance to be rendered to the dying, records the method of confessing and the prayers for the agonizing. Abraham ben Isaac Laniado also wrote a book, entitled *The Shield of Abraham*, a work much esteemed by the Jews, wherein he treats of the confession of sins. See also Basnage, l. vii., ch. 24.

and offered up his death to the Supreme Judge in expiation of the faults inherent in our nature, from which even the just are not exempt. This duty accomplished, Joachim asked for his daughter, in order to give her his blessing. Mary came;* her ardent prayers for the preservation of her father's life had not been heard. The *jealous God* would sever, one by one, the earthly bonds of his chosen Spouse, to the end that she might lean only on Him.

Some pious authors have thought that, at the moment when Joachim extended his hands to bless his child, a revelation from on high suddenly disclosed to him the glorious destiny awaiting her; the joy of the elect diffused itself over his venerable countenance, his arms fell by his side, he bowed down his head and died.

The house then resounded with cries and lamentations. The women hacked their breasts and tore their hair;† the men covered their heads with ashes and rent their garments, whilst some of the matrons, moved by charity and devotion, spread a thick veil over the pale calm face of the just man, who was never more to be seen in this world, and folded the thumb within the hand, which was left open to denote the total abandonment of all earthly things.

After having washed the body in water, mingled with myrrh and dried rose-leaves, those pious women wrapped it up in a linen shroud, which they tied round with bands after the manner of Egypt. Having then opened all the doors and windows of the house,‡ they lit near the corpse a brazen lamp, with several sockets

* It was customary, from the very times of the patriarchs, for the dying father to bless his children. Mary had to conform to this custom. Her seclusion in the temple was not monastic, and St. Joachim then resided in Jerusalem.

† St. Jerome remarks that, in his time, most of the Jews still slashed their skin on the death of their friends, and made themselves bald by tearing out their hair, which they sacrificed to death.

‡ Dead bodies, amongst the Jews, defiled those who touched them and rendered them unclean. (Misnah, *Ordo puritatum*.) "When the doors are closed, the house of death is regarded as a sepulchre, and, consequently, it is defiled; when the doors are open, on the contrary, the impurity goes away." (*Maimonides*.)



—the lamp of the dead—which cast its mournful reflection on the bed of death.

On the following day, a numerous train, in which the flute-players were conspicuous,* stopped before the house of death. The nearest of kin ascended to the upper chamber wherein Joachim had been laid out, and placed the corpse on a bed,† which they then took upon their shoulders. The funeral procession traversed the streets of Jerusalem chanting funeral hymns, accompanied by the soft wailing sound of the flutes, drowned at times in the noisy lamentations of the weepers. Ann and Mary were present at the funeral, and walked with downcast eyes amongst the matrons of their family, whose tears flowed profusely.‡

The procession passed through the *gate of flocks*, since known to Christians as the Virgin's gate. On reaching the place of sepulture, the sound of the flutes, the hymns, and the lamentations all ceased awhile, and the chief mourners thus apostrophized the dead: "Blessed be God, who formed and nourished thee, and has now deprived thee of life. Oh, ye dead, he knows your number, and will one day raise ye up! Blessed be He who taketh life and restoreth it again!"§

They then put a small bag of clay on the head of the corpse, and proceeded to open the sepulchre—a gloomy grotto, which was

* Jesus found the flute-players making a great noise at the door of a nobleman whose daughter he restored to life. Maimonides says that the poorest of the Jews is obliged to hire two flute-players and a weeper for the burial of his wife, and that the rich are to increase the number in proportion to their wealth. See also *Fleury, Mœurs des Israélites*, page 106.

† These funeral beds were used long before coffins; the latter are still unknown to the Arabs, who bury their dead only in a shroud, which enables the jackals, who prowl at night through the cemeteries, to disinter the bodies and devour them.

‡ Women and children assisted at the funerals of their husbands and fathers. The widow of Naïm followed the corpse of her son; Joseph mourned for his father. This custom is still observed in Judea. The Hebrew children received the blessing of their parents, closed their eyes, and accompanied them to their last resting-place, amongst the bones of their fathers. (M. Salvador, *Histoire des Institutions de Moïse et du peuple Hébreu*, t. ii., p. 398.)

§ Leo de Modena, *Cout des Juifs*. Buxtorf, *Syn. Hebr.* p. 502.

called *the house of the living**—wherein the patriarch was to sleep his last sleep, awaiting the other members of his family. Then the most heart-rending cries arose on every side. Ann threw herself on the mortal remains of her husband to bid him a last farewell, and was soon taken away almost insensible. Having committed to the earth the holy remains of the just man, they rolled to the mouth of the sepulchral cave an enormous stone, which no man was to remove *under pain of excommunication*. The cries of lamentation began once more, and the spectators, pulling three different times a tuft of grass, and casting it each time behind them, said, in a sorrowful tone, *They shall flourish like the grass of the fields!* These rites terminated the obsequies of the descendant of the kings of Juda—the father of Mary—the grandsire of Jesus, according to the flesh.†

The tender heart of the Blessed Virgin was crushed by this first affliction—the prelude to so many others. It was her apprenticeship in sorrow. Misfortune greeted her on the threshold of adolescence, but the noble child shrank not from its approach. She wept, for her soul—like that of her divine Son—was never cold or insensible; but she drained the bitter chalice, saying, “Jehovah, thy will be done!” The mother and daughter put on mourning after the manner of the Hebrews; they clothed themselves in tight robes, made of a coarse camlet, called hair-

* The sepulchre, which should be called *the house of the dead*. They gave it, on the contrary, the title of *house of the living*, to denote that the immortal soul survives its separation from the body. This title is attributed to the Pharisees. (Basn., l. vii., 24.) The Rabbins give an exact description of these sepulchres. The door is usually made very narrow, for they are generally closed by a stone rolled to the entrance. A large space is left in the middle of the sepulchre, where the bearers go in and rest the coffin before it is put in its place. In the sides and at the end were hollowed out a certain number of niches, wherein the dead bodies of each family were placed. Tombs were held in great respect. No one was allowed to cross them in making a road or an aqueduct, nor to cut wood there, nor bring flocks to graze. They were placed on the side of the highway, in order to remind the passengers of death, and to keep the dead in their recollection. (Lightfoot, *Cent. chorogr.*, c. 100.) We see in the Gospel that the tomb of Lazarus was a cave closed by a large stone.

† Salom. ben Virgæ., *Hist. Jud.*, p. 193. Léon de Modena, *Cout. relig. des Juifs*. Basnage, l. vii., ch. 25

cloth; their head and feet bare, their face concealed in a fold of their robes, fasting and abstaining,* they remained for seven days seated on the ground, weeping and lamenting with their kindred, and praying for the departed soul.† When the seven days were ended, Ann had lamps lit in the synagogue, and prayers offered up for her husband, giving alms in proportion to her means. Mary, on her side, fasted every week on the day of her father's death, and prayed morning and evening for the repose of his soul. These fasts and prayers for the dead lasted for the space of eleven months.‡

"Thou art welcome, O Misfortune! if thou comest alone," say the Greeks. Thus, this first affliction of Mary's was followed by one more poignant still, and she was soon called upon to renew her mourning. Scarcely had the death-lamp been extinguished in the melancholy dwelling of St. Ann when it had to be lit again; the last tears which Mary had shed for one parent were scarcely dry on her cheek, when she had to bewail the loss of the other.§ One evening Mary, accompanied by some of her kindred, went down from the temple to the narrow and obscure street in which her mother lived. The lurid glare of a lamp shone out through one of the latticed windows of the humble dwelling. Before the threshold were grouped, in silence, some of the women who, even now, throughout all the East, make a trade of weeping for the dead; like those birds of ill omen which seem to foresee deaths, these sinister creatures were waiting for the moment when an afflicted family should come to engage their hired lamentations.]

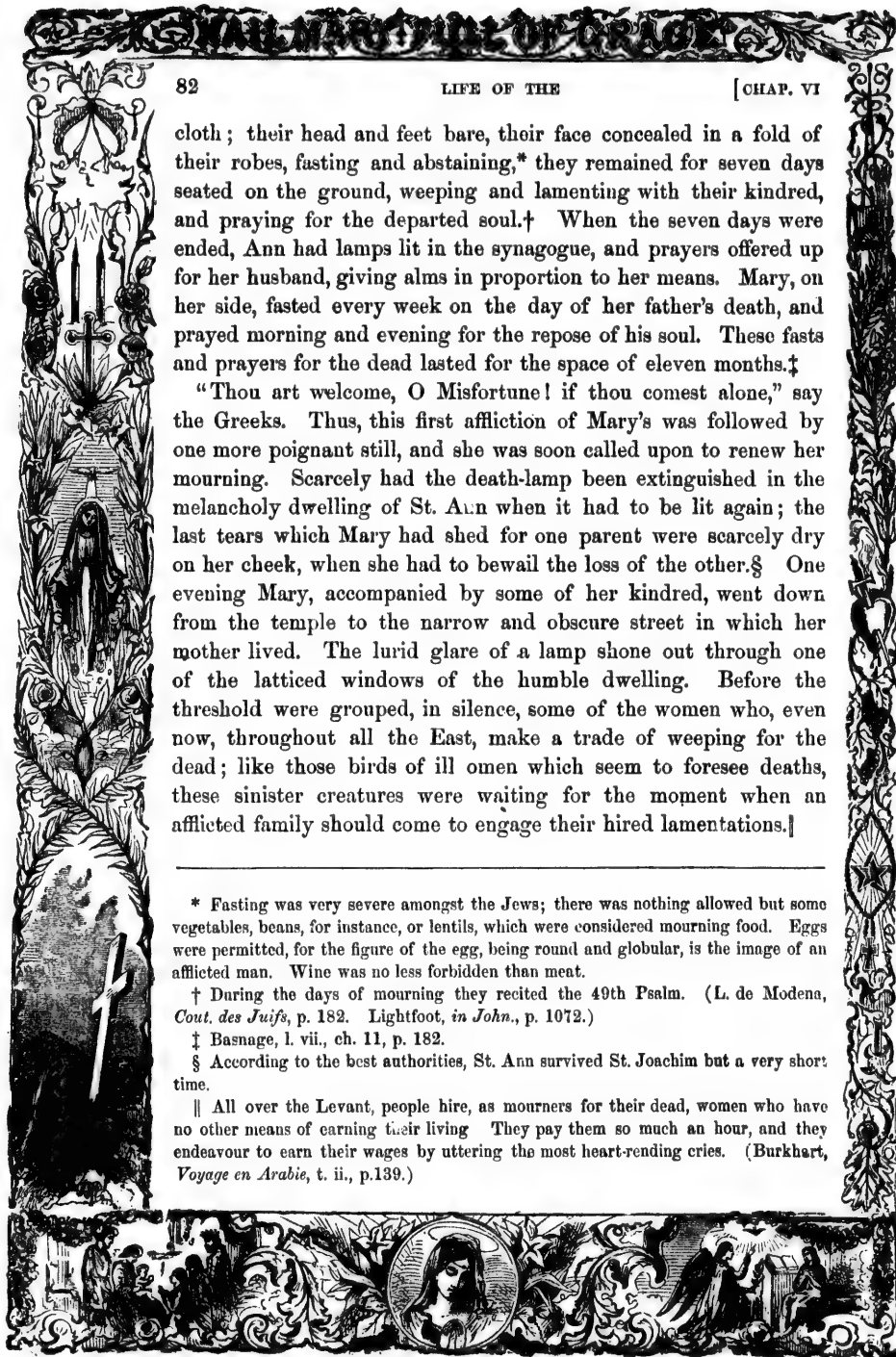
* Fasting was very severe amongst the Jews; there was nothing allowed but some vegetables, beans, for instance, or lentils, which were considered mourning food. Eggs were permitted, for the figure of the egg, being round and globular, is the image of an afflicted man. Wine was no less forbidden than meat.

† During the days of mourning they recited the 49th Psalm. (L. de Modena, *Cout. des Juifs*, p. 182. Lightfoot, in *John.*, p. 1072.)

‡ Basnage, l. vii., ch. 11, p. 182.

§ According to the best authorities, St. Ann survived St. Joachim but a very short time.

|| All over the Levant, people hire, as mourners for their dead, women who have no other means of earning their living. They pay them so much an hour, and they endeavour to earn their wages by uttering the most heart-rending cries. (Burkhardt, *Voyage en Arabie*, t. ii., p. 139.)



St. Ann collected all her failing strength to bless her daughter, pathetically recommended her to her friends, but especially to Him who is the Father of the orphan, and then calmly slept the sleep of the just.* Mary bent in anguish over the lifeless body of her mother; her fair tresses mingled with the snowy locks of the dead. It seemed as though she hoped that her tears would restore her to life; but it is only the breath of God that can reanimate the dead. When the first paroxysm of her grief was over, Mary closed the eyes of the saint, and took leave of her by a long, last kiss, according to the custom of her people.†

The sorrow of the young orphan was deep and silent, and endured with heroic patience. Having now no other support on earth but Providence, she took refuge in the bosom of God. Thence, as from the depth of a peaceful harbour, she overheard the distant roaring of the world's storms, and comprehended all the vanity of earthly things; the vanity of rank, of greatness, of wealth, of beauty, things which glitter and pass away like the bubble on the wintry torrent, which itself disappears at the end of a season.

It is at this period of sorrow, of isolation and lonely watching, that a historian has judiciously fixed Mary's vow of perpetual virginity;‡ in fact, we do not anywhere find that either Ann or Joachim knew of that vow, and without their knowledge it was not valid in the eyes of the law, either civil or religious.§ It was, therefore, after their death that Mary chose the Lord for her

* Grave historians state that the blessed Virgin was present at the death of her mother, which is quite conformable to the customs of the Hebrews.

† This custom is very ancient, for Philo, relating the complaints of Jacob for the untimely death of his son, makes him say that he will not have the consolation of *closing his eyes, and giving him the parting kiss.*

‡ Descoutures, *Vie de la Sainte Vierge*, p. 27.

§ A young girl might make vows amongst the Jews, and she could even make a vow of virginity; but such vow was annulled by paternal authority, because that, being subject to her father, she could not violate the law of nature by disobeying him. All vows made by a young maiden or a married woman, unknown or contrary to the will of a father or husband, were null. (*Num.*, ch. xxx.) Some Rabbins maintain, nevertheless, that the father or husband had to annul the vow within twenty-four hours after they had cognizance of it, otherwise it was valid. (*Basnago*, l. vii., ch. 19.)



portion, and devoted herself to his service without any limitation of time, says Bernardine de Busto, and with the intention of remaining always in the temple. Like the august founder of her race, the Virgin found *that a day spent in the tabernacles of the God of Israel was worth a thousand*, and she also would rather be the last in the holy place than the first under the tents of cedar.

CHAPTER VII.

MARRIAGE OF THE VIRGIN.

WHETHER Joachim, on his death-bed, had placed the Virgin under the special protection of the priesthood; or that the magistrates who took care of orphans had themselves chosen guardians for her in the powerful family of Aaron, to which she was related by the mother's side; or that the tutelage of children devoted to the service of the temple belonged of right to the Levites, it is certain that Mary, after the death of her parents, had guardians of the sacerdotal race. It is probable (and the Arab traditions say so) that the cares of this tutelage devolved chiefly on Zachary, the holy spouse of St. Elizabeth, whose high reputation and near relationship*

* The Jews, as also Celsus, Porphyry, and Faust, have taken occasion from this relationship to maintain that the blessed Virgin was of the tribe of Levi. Catholic doctors combat this opinion. They maintain that Mary was of the tribe of Juda, and the family of David. In fact, St. Mathew tells us that Jesus Christ is called the son of David according to the flesh. Now, he can only be the son of David through Mary, since he had no father amongst men. When it is asked how it is that Mary, being of the tribe of Juda, was the cousin of St. Elizabeth, who was of the tribe of Levi, St. Augustine answers that there is nothing improbable in the supposition that a man of the tribe of Juda had taken a wife of the tribe of Levi, and that the blessed Virgin, the issue of that marriage, was related by her mother to St. Elizabeth. It is elsewhere proved that the prohibition of marrying into another tribe regarded only heiresses.

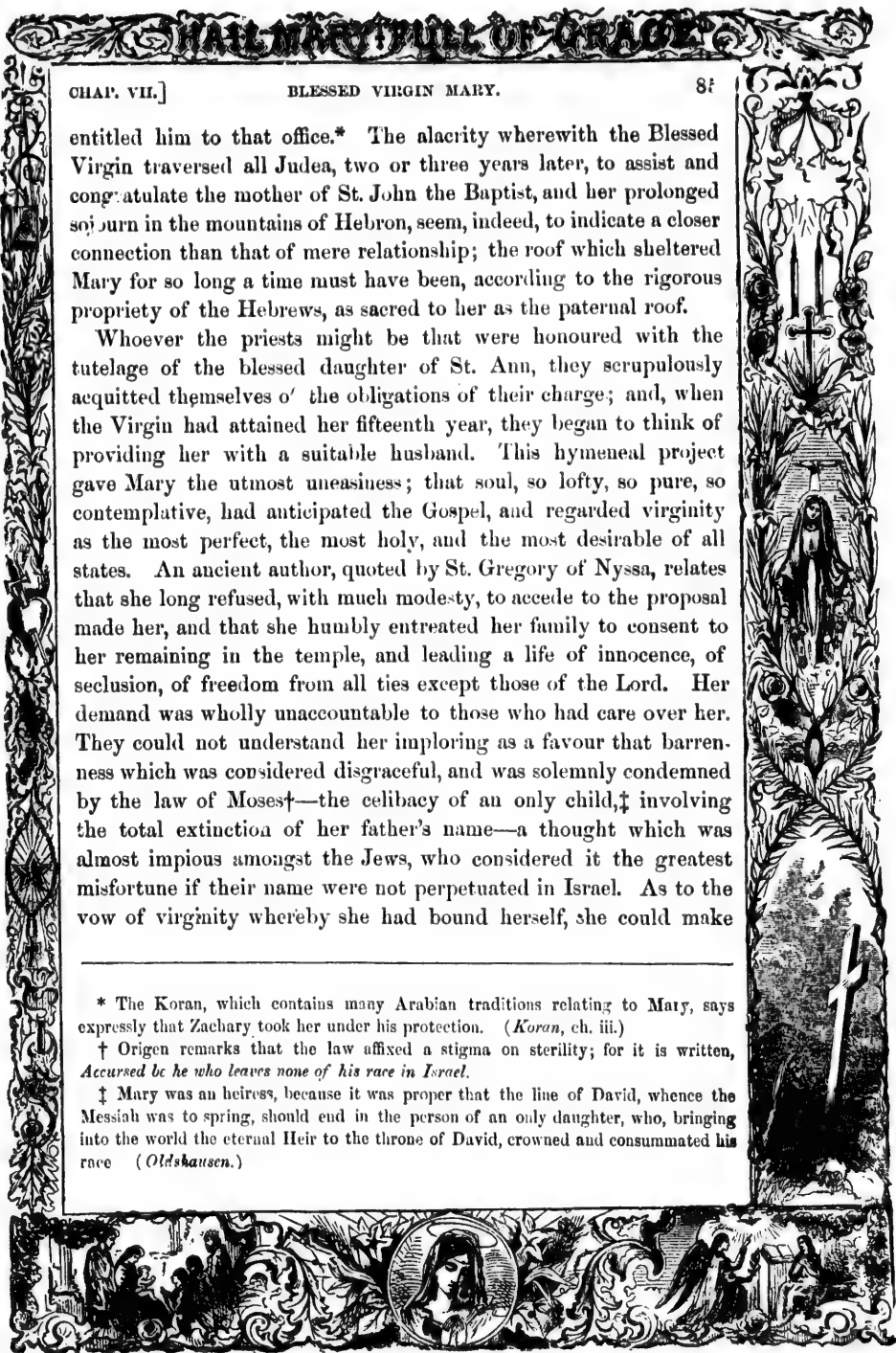
entitled him to that office.* The alacrity wherewith the Blessed Virgin traversed all Judea, two or three years later, to assist and congratulate the mother of St. John the Baptist, and her prolonged sojourn in the mountains of Hebron, seem, indeed, to indicate a closer connection than that of mere relationship; the roof which sheltered Mary for so long a time must have been, according to the rigorous propriety of the Hebrews, as sacred to her as the paternal roof.

Whoever the priests might be that were honoured with the tutelage of the blessed daughter of St. Ann, they scrupulously acquitted themselves of the obligations of their charge; and, when the Virgin had attained her fifteenth year, they began to think of providing her with a suitable husband. This hymeneal project gave Mary the utmost uneasiness; that soul, so lofty, so pure, so contemplative, had anticipated the Gospel, and regarded virginity as the most perfect, the most holy, and the most desirable of all states. An ancient author, quoted by St. Gregory of Nyssa, relates that she long refused, with much modesty, to accede to the proposal made her, and that she humbly entreated her family to consent to her remaining in the temple, and leading a life of innocence, of seclusion, of freedom from all ties except those of the Lord. Her demand was wholly unaccountable to those who had care over her. They could not understand her imploring as a favour that barrenness which was considered disgraceful, and was solemnly condemned by the law of Moses†—the celibacy of an only child,‡ involving the total extinction of her father's name—a thought which was almost impious amongst the Jews, who considered it the greatest misfortune if their name were not perpetuated in Israel. As to the vow of virginity whereby she had bound herself, she could make

* The Koran, which contains many Arabian traditions relating to Mary, says expressly that Zachary took her under his protection. (*Koran*, ch. iii.)

† Origen remarks that the law affixed a stigma on sterility; for it is written, *Accursed be he who leaves none of his race in Israel.*

‡ Mary was an heiress, because it was proper that the line of David, whence the Messiah was to spring, should end in the person of an only daughter, who, bringing into the world the eternal Heir to the throne of David, crowned and consummated his race (*Oldshausen*.)



no excuse of that, since it might be annulled by a decision of the family-council. It is known that woman was, *everywhere and always*, treated as a minor before the promulgation of that immortal code which has gloriously removed from her *the curse of slavery*.

Hence it was that the Virgin's supplies found but little sympathy even amongst the priests of Jehovah. Such virtues were far beyond their reach, and with all their learning and penetration the angelic and all-holy soul of Mary was to them a seven-sealed book. Her thought, which was far in advance of her age and contrary to all the ancient prejudices of her nation, remained incomprehensible, and all that she could bring forward, in order to excuse herself from entering on a state so wholly opposed to her dearest wishes, was of no avail. Besides, how could she have succeeded, since God himself was against her? It was the will of God that her marriage with a just man, who was to render testimony to the purity of her life, should screen her from the importunities of the young Hebrews, who might have sought her hand even in the temple, as St. Augustine observes,* and also give to her and her divine Son a protector in the hour of peril. It was the only means of hiding the mystery of the Incarnation from the malevolent scrutiny of a perverse world, which would have laid hold of the miracle as a subject for the most abominable conjectures, and might even have been so infatuated by false zeal as to stone the Mother of the Saviour, as they afterwards sought to stone the woman taken in adultery;† for mercy was never one of the chosen virtues of the Hebrews, and God himself reproaches them, by the mouth of his prophets, *with having their heart as hard as adamant*.

In addition to these powerful reasons, which were hidden in the impenetrable obscurity of the counsels of God, there was another which had its source in the antediluvian traditions and in national pride, and that one reason, of itself, left little chance of success for the timid opposition of the Virgin. Perpetual chastity, which Christians have made the queen of virtues, was almost unknown

* St. Aug., *de Sancta Virg.*, c. 14.

† St. John Chrys., *serm. 3, in Math.*

amongst the disciples of Moses, who lived for many ages in anxious expectation of the *Messiah-King* (*Melech-Hamaschiak*). A young flower of the root of Jesse, a daughter of David, was not at liberty to reject the bonds of Hymen. She owed a son to the ambitious piety of her family, who would not have renounced, for all the treasures of the great king, the hope of one day numbering amongst themselves the Liberator of Israel. This hope, which had sustained the Jews when the Chaldeans, *mounted on horses swifter than eagles*, violently rent asunder the embattled wall of Sion, and transplanted its people to the banks of the Euphrates—this hope was mingled with a bitter desire of revenge ever since the Romans ruled in Asia. The Hebrews hoped soon to see the day when the eagles should fly before the emerald banner,* and when the device of the Maccabees† should wave in triumph over that of the Roman senate. Never did the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies seem so near at hand, and hence the moment was unfavourable for obtaining the favour solicited by Mary.

According to the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary and the Proto-gospel of St. James, the guardians of the Blessed Virgin, regardless of her remonstrances, convoked a meeting of her nearest relations, all of the race of David and tribe of Juda, like herself,‡ in order to proceed to the choice of the husband whom they imposed upon her. Amongst those who were entitled to aspire to her hand, there were a number of young Israelites, some handsome and brave, others the possessors of fertile lands, vineyards, flocks and groves of olives. The captains of Juda would have added to Mary's portion a part of the spoils and slaves taken in battle; the nabobs of her tribe would have covered her with the gold-embroidered stuffs of India, and with thrice-dyed Tyrian purple; whilst the sons of commerce, who traded in the emeralds of Egypt, the turquoises of Iran, and

* The standard of Juda was of a green colour. (*Dom Calmet*.)

† This banner of the Maccabees bore the words: "Who is like unto thee, O Eternal? *Mi canocha baclim, Jehovah?*"

‡ Every maiden who inherited a property—and not maidens in general, as the Vulgate says—was bound to marry a man of her own family and tribe, and not her nearest relation, as Montesquien asserts. This was in order that patrimonies might not pass from one tribe to another.



the pearls of the Persian Gulf, would have laid at her feet chains of precious stones, costly bracelets and ear-rings, that were worth a prince's ransom—in short, all the brilliant insignia of female servitude. But these were all weighed in the balance and found wanting. Despising the advantages of youth, beauty, high rank, wealth, and martial glory, the priestly guardians of the Blessed Virgin and the ancients of her house fixed their choice on a man of advanced age,* a decayed patrician, whose fortune had been swallowed up in the political revolutions and religious wars of Judea as the sea absorbs a drop of rain, leaving him only his arms and his trade. This poor, but high-born old man, who, according to the Proto-gospel of St. James, was a widower,† but according to St. Jerome had never been married, and this last is the prevailing opinion of the Church—this old man was Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth.

When we think of the rare beauty of Mary, the education which she had received in the temple, the great connections of her family,

* The Proto-gospel of St. James, ch. 2, and the *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*, ch. 8 (books whose contents have been, for the most part, approved of, even by the Fathers of the Church), merely say that he was already old. St. Epiphanius gives eighty years to Joseph at the time of his marriage, Father Pezron fifty, and *l'Histoire divine de la Vierge*, by Marie d'Agrada, thirty-three. The supposition of St. Epiphanius will not bear examination; it is, moreover, solemnly refuted by the Hebrew law, which forbids the union of a young woman and an old man, and places it in the most disgraceful category. (Bash., l. vii., ch. 21.) *Hist. des Institutions de Moïse*. Neither the priests nor Joseph would have done that which was condemned by the law. The age given by Marie d'Agrada to Joseph does not agree with the opinion of the Fathers; there remains but that of Father Pezron, which is altogether the most probable.

† Many of the Fathers have thought that St. Joseph was a widower when he espoused the Blessed Virgin. The Proto-gospel of St. James and the Gospel of the Nativity of the Virgin both mention it as a fact. St. Epiphanius asserts that he had had four sons and two daughters. St. Hippolytus, of Thebes, calls his first wife Salomé. Origen, Eusebius, St. Ambrose and several other Fathers have adopted the same opinion. Yet still it is by no means generally received, and it is commonly thought that St. Joseph led a life of virginity. Such is the opinion of St. Jerome, who expressly says, writing against Helvidius, "We nowhere read that he had had any other wife than Mary; *aliam eum uxorem habuisse non scribitur*." St. Augustine leaves the question undecided; but St. Peter Damian declares it to be the belief of the entire Church that St. Joseph, who passed for the father of the Saviour, was a virgin like unto Mary.

and her quality of heiress, which was a desirable and even brilliant lot amongst the Jews, who endowed their wives and received scarcely anything with them,* we might be astonished at this decision of her family, were we not informed by the Fathers that Joseph was chosen by lot and by the express manifestation of the divine will.† An ancient tradition, inserted in the Proto-gospel of St. James and mentioned by St. Jerome, relates that the candidates, after having invoked Him who *decides lots*, left each his own almond-tree rod in the temple in the evening, and that next day the dry and withered branch of Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Nathan, was found green and blossomed like that which had of old secured the priesthood to the Aaronites. The history of Mount Carmel states that, at sight of this prodigy, which annihilated his hopes, a young and wealthy patrician, belonging to one of the most powerful families of Judea, broke his rod in pieces, with every token of despair, and hastened to shut himself up in one of the caves of Carmel with the disciples of Elias.‡

When the guardians had made their choice, they announced it to Mary, and that admirable young Virgin, accustomed only to works of fancy—reared amid the perfumes, the melodious songs, and fairy pageants of the holy house, hesitated not a moment in devoting herself to an obscure life, menial occupations and arduous cares, with the humble artisan chosen by her friends. A divine revelation had, they say, made known to her that this just man would be to her only a protector, a father, and the guardian of her chastity.§ What would she more? The Lord had heard her prayer. While leaving her faithful to the vow which she had made, he gave her, in addition, the merit of obedience.

* On the occasion of the marriage-contract, the woman only received from her friends the apparel necessary for her. It was the husband who gave the dowry (M. Salvador, *Institutions de Moïse*, t. ii., ch. 1.)

† *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*, ch. 7; *Proto-gosp. St. James*, ch. 8; *St. Hieron. in Dan.*, l. iv., ch. 5; *St. Greg. Naz., hom. de St. Nat.*; *Niceph.*, b. ii., ch. 7.

‡ This young candidate for the Virgin's hand, who was named Agabus, afterward became a Christian, it is said, and was famous for his sanctity. (See *Histoire du Carmel*, ch. xii.)

§ *Vie de la Sainte Vierge*, by Descoutures, p. 49. *Vie de Jésus Christ*, by Valverde, t. i., p. 71.



The projected marriage of Joseph and Mary must have excited surprise both in Nazareth and in Jerusalem, for there was little similarity of age, fortune, or condition between the pair. It would, however, be a great mistake to think that this union, apparently so disproportionate, was regarded by Jewish society (whose habits were simple and primitive) as in any degree improper. Though not holding a distinguished rank in the state, the trade of a mechanic was neither abject nor degrading in Israel.* We see in the genealogy of the tribe of Juda a family of workers in fine flax, and another of potters, whose memory is held in honour, and Scripture has handed down to posterity the names of Belesael and Hiram. It is well known that St. Paul, brought up to the study of the law, the famous Pharisean doctor, Hillel, and since them many doctors who, according to the emphatic language of the Rab'bins, *shed light on the holy nation*, were not ashamed to apply themselves to the most common mechanical arts. But what is more: all the Israelites were artificers; for every father of a family, whatever might be his social position, was bound to make his son learn a trade, *unless*, said the law, *he would make him a thief*†

Those Jews whose patrimony had passed into the hands of strangers, had no other alternative than to quit the country or support themselves by the labour of their hands, awaiting the arrival of that grand epoch which restored all property to its original owners. They whose love of country induced them to adopt the latter course, were in no way degraded thereby or incapacitated for any office in the state. Unlike Egypt and India, Israel had no *castes*; her pride was based on her religious belief, and her descent from

* Mechanics are still highly respected in Judea. "In Syria and Palestine," says Burckhart, "the corporations of mechanics are almost as much respected as they were during the middle ages in France and Germany. A master-tradesman is there considered equal to a merchant of the second class. He can marry into the respectable families of the city, and has usually more influence in his own locality than a merchant who has three times his wealth." (Burckhart, *Voyage en Arabie*, t. ii., p. 139.)

† Any man who does not give his children a profession, said the Pharisean school, prepares them for a bad life. . . . "Be not burdensome to any one. . . . Never say, I am a man of quality—that occupation does not suit me. Rabbi Johanan wrought as a skinner, Nahum as a copier of books, another Johanan made sandals, and Rabbi Juda knew the baking trade." (*Talmud*, Tract. *Kidouschim*, *Pessah*, *Aboth*, *Soto*.)

the patriarchs. "To be the issue of Abraham according to the flesh," says the great Bossuet, "was a distinction beyond all others." In fact, the lowest of the Hebrews was held as a prince in comparison with strangers.* There were, however, amongst the Jews, as amongst the Arabs, some tribes more illustrious and some houses more noble than others. The tribe of Juda, which carried the national standard at the head of the embattled *thousands* of Israel, and with whom the sceptre was to remain till the coming of the Messiah, had always the pre-eminence; and the family of David was the first and most honoured amongst the families of Juda. Now Joseph, although poor, was of the Davidical race. The blood of twenty kings flowed in his veins, and it was Zorobabel, one of his ancestors, who brought back the people of God from the land of exile. Since that time, the splendour of his house had gradually declined; his family had become identified with the people, like that of Moses and of Samuel, but its illustrious origin was not forgotten. In our own days, the humble Abassides, who vegetate in the depth of the Hedjaz, are still honoured as the descendants of Haroun-al-Raschid, and the highest family in Arabia would not disdain their alliance.

The holy daughter of Joachim did not lower herself, therefore, as much as might be thought by espousing the CARPENTER. This is said in a worldly sense; for, if we regard this union from a higher point of view, we find that it was in fact a noble alliance. God gave not to his chosen Virgin a man whose merit consisted in his lands, his vines, or his shekels of gold—things which often change masters, and are not more inherent in the rich than the clothes which they leave off at night. He gave her a just man, the most perfect of his works. The Lord takes no account of the vain gewgaws which delight mankind; before Him there is no distinction between the poor creatures who crawl a moment in the dust, soon to become the pasture of worms. *Man judges by appearance, says the Scripture, but Jehovah beholds the heart.* If God chose the humble Joseph to be the spouse of the Queen of angels, the adop-

* The Jews have not lost this opinion with their nationality, they hold it still.

tive father of the Messiah, it was because he possessed treasures of grace and of sanctity which the angels themselves might envy; it was because that his virtues had made him first amongst his people, and that his name stood far higher in the book of life—the heraldic annals of eternity—than that of the imperial Cæsar. The Virgin was not confided to the most powerful, but to the most worthy; thus the ark, which the princes and captains of Israel dared not touch for fear of being stricken with death, drew down the blessing of heaven on the house of a simple Levite wherein it was sheltered.

Joseph, in presence of the guardians and some witnesses, presented her with a small piece of money, the value of which is not now known,* saying, "If thou consentest to become my wife, accept this pledge." Mary, by accepting the gift, was solemnly bound, and thence forward nothing but a formal divorce could restore her to freedom. The contract was drawn up by certain of the Scribes. It was concise, and not overburdened with technical terms.† The husband promised to honour his wife, to provide for her support, according to the custom of Hebrew husbands, and secured to her a dowry of two hundred zuses (fifty crowns), being just the same for the daughter of a prince as for the daughter of a mechanic, but it might be increased according to the wealth of the husband. After having insured this dowry by pledging all his possessions, and even his cloak, which, nevertheless, the law did not allow to be claimed

* Hillel and Schammai warmly discuss the value of this marriage-coin, mentioned by the Talmud, but have come to no conclusion on the subject. (Basn., l. vii., ch. 21.)

† The following is the literal form of the marriage contract of the Hebrews. It was in use from the very earliest times, and must, therefore, have been employed at the marriage of Joseph and Mary. "In the year . . . , the . . . day of the month of . . . Benjamin, son of . . . , said to Rachel, daughter of . . . , Become my wife under the law of Moses and of Israel. I promise to respect thee, to provide for thy maintenance, in food and clothing, according to the custom of Hebrew husbands who honour their wives and maintain them in a proper manner. I give thee at this present . . . (the sum fixed by the law), and I promise thee, over and above thy food, clothing, and all other necessities, that conjugal love, which is common to people of all nations. Rachel consents to become the wife of Benjamin, who, of his own free will, and in order to make a dowry proportioned to his means, does add to the dowry aforesaid the sum of . . ." (*Inst. de Moïse.*)

until after his death,* Joseph signed the contract, to which Mary likewise affixed her signature. A short benediction in honour of God terminated this ceremony, which took place several months before that of the marriage.

The marriage of the Blessed Virgin was solemnized in Jerusalem, and the most dignified members of her family made it their duty to appear on the occasion, with all that magnificence so characteristic of the East, and which excites the wonder of European travellers—even the common people exhibiting at such times the most unheard-of splendour.† Not to invite all their relatives, on an occasion so solemn, would have been tantamount to rejecting the ancient customs of their fathers—a thing which could never happen amongst that traditionary people, as unchanging in its customs as in its religious practices, as Philo, the Jew, truly said to the emperor Caius. It would, moreover, have outraged all the observances of Hebrew society; and the presence of Mary at the wedding of Cana proves, on the contrary, that she conformed to them.

It was a bright winter's day,‡ and the new moon was slowly rising behind the mountains,§ when a long train of richly-dressed women was seen to approach the dwelling of Mary. The light of the torches, borne by a number of slaves, flashed on their cinctures of gold, their strings of pearl, the jewelled crescents which they wore on their foreheads, and the diamonds of their Persian tiaras.¶ Those daughters of Sion still retained the use of paint,

* Basnage, l. vii., ch. 21.

† "We in Europe have no idea of the splendour displayed in the East on such occasions," says Baron Geramb in his *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem*; "the nuptial garment of almost every woman is of crimson velvet, embroidered with gold; with this they wear numerous diamond and pearl ornaments." M. de Lamartine was likewise dazzled with the superb costumes and profusion of jewels displayed by the women of Syria at the weddings of their friends.

‡ In the middle of the sixteenth century the Church authorized the celebration of this festival. It is solemnized on the 22d of January, being, it is said, the day on which the marriage took place. The city of Arras holds this festival on the 23d of January, and some of the Flemish churches on the 24th of the same month.

§ Amongst the Jews marriages were not celebrated indiscriminately on every day of the week; they were usually solemnized at the time of a new moon, and on Wednesday rather than any other day. (Basn. l. vii., ch. 21.)

¶ Isai, cap. iii.

which was known even in the days of Jezabel; their brows and eyelashes were painted black, and the tips of their fingers were red as the berries of the aglantine.* Being ushered into the inner room, where the young and holy bride was seated in company with some pious matrons of her family, they blessed God for giving her a husband to protect her, and complimented her on her approaching marriage, the festivities of which they came to share.

Belonging to Jewish society, with whom the bridal adornment was a Biblical reminiscence, and could not be dispensed with, Mary was obliged to submit for a while to the requirements of Eastern luxury, although it had no charms for her. Gold, pearls, and rich stuffs are not, of themselves, reprehensible; it is only the thoughts of pride and vanity which they engender in weak minds that are positively evil. Queen Matilda was more humble under her embroidered garments, studded with jewels, than the coarsely-clad women with whom she shut herself up, after her glorious regency; such is the simple testimony of the chroniclers of those times.

Taking care, then, to avoid that disregard of dress which would have been sure to give offence, at a time when custom required even of the wedding-guests a certain richness of costume—failing in which they were expelled, as we see even by the Gospel—the young descendant of the kings of Juda was bound to wear, on that occasion, a rich and becoming costume, and we see by authentic relics that such was the case.† Her robe was carefully preserved in Palestine, and thence conveyed to Constantinople in 461 (as we learn from Nicephorus). It was exceedingly valuable both in ornament and design. The ground was of a buff, or nankin colour, interspersed with flowers of blue, white, violet and gold. It is now the holy relic of Chartres.‡

In memory of ancient times and the patriarchal customs of her

* Throughout all the East, the women colour the tips of their fingers with *lausonia inermis* (Linn.). This plant abounds in the isle of Cyprus.

† There are two of the Virgin's tunics still preserved, and they are made of very precious stuff. Chardin saw one of these in Mingrelia; it was of a nankin colour and richly embroidered.

‡ This tunic was given by Charles the Bald to the Church of Chartres in 877. Numerous miracles have been attributed to it.



fathers, she wore, like Rebecca, ear-rings and bracelets of gold—a modest and indispensable present which Joseph had to send some days before the ceremony,* and to which the richer Hebrews added necklaces of pearls and magnificent sets of jewels. Instead of the pointed golden crown† worn by the brides of the more opulent classes, there was placed on Mary's fair tresses‡ a simple wreath of myrtle, which in spring would have been intertwined with roses.§ Her bridal veil covered her from head to foot, and floated around her like a cloud.¶

A canopy of precious stuff, borne by four young Hebrews, awaited the bride outside her dwelling.¶ Mary was placed there between two matrons, the one on the right representing her mother; the other was probably that Mary of Cleophas, supposed by some authors to have been the elder daughter of St. Ann, but who was only the sister-in-law of the Virgin.** After them came all the nuptial train, waving palm and myrtle branches in token of re-

* The Christians of Damascus have retained this custom. Some days before the nuptial feast, the bridegroom sends to his betrothed a pair of bracelets either of gold or of jewels, according to his means, a piece of gold brocade, and 160 dollars for the expenses of the bath and the wedding banquet. (*Corres. d'Orient*, lettre 147.)

† The bride's crown was usually of gold, and made in the form of a tower like that of Cybella. This custom was abolished during the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, but the wreaths of myrtle and roses were retained. (Basn., l. vii., ch. 21.)

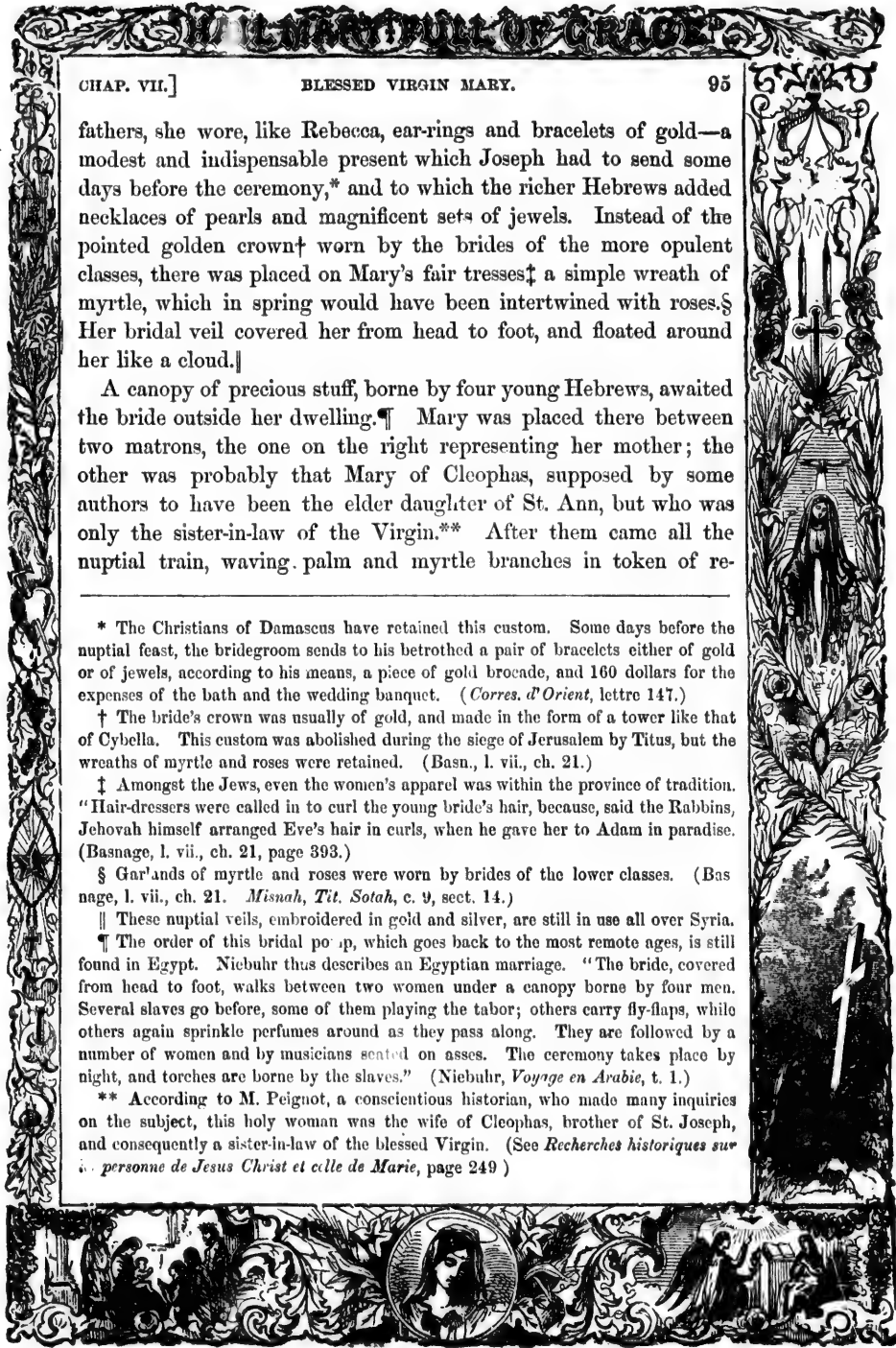
‡ Amongst the Jews, even the women's apparel was within the province of tradition. "Hair-dressers were called in to curl the young bride's hair, because, said the Rabbins, Jehovah himself arranged Eve's hair in curls, when he gave her to Adam in paradise. (Basnage, l. vii., ch. 21, page 393.)

§ Garlands of myrtle and roses were worn by brides of the lower classes. (Basnage, l. vii., ch. 21. *Misnah, Tit. Sotah*, c. 9, sect. 14.)

¶ These nuptial veils, embroidered in gold and silver, are still in use all over Syria.

¶ The order of this bridal procession, which goes back to the most remote ages, is still found in Egypt. Niebuhr thus describes an Egyptian marriage. "The bride, covered from head to foot, walks between two women under a canopy borne by four men. Several slaves go before, some of them playing the tabor; others carry fly-flaps, while others again sprinkle perfumes around as they pass along. They are followed by a number of women and by musicians seated on asses. The ceremony takes place by night, and torches are borne by the slaves." (Niebuhr, *Voyage en Arabie*, t. 1.)

** According to M. Peignot, a conscientious historian, who made many inquiries on the subject, this holy woman was the wife of Cleophas, brother of St. Joseph, and consequently a sister-in-law of the blessed Virgin. (See *Recherches historiques sur la personne de Jesus Christ et celle de Marie*, page 249.)



joining.* The procession moved along to the sound of cymbals, harps and flutes playing grave and simple airs in concert;† these were probably identical with the choirs of David. Then came the bridegroom, his brow adorned with a fantastic crown, clear as crystal and peculiar to his people.‡ He was surrounded by a number of friends singing an epithalamium, imitated from Solomon's Canticle of Canticles, that mystic and sublime marriage-song whose lofty metaphors have each a divine and hidden meaning. They sang the beauty of the young bride, whose *locks were as branches of palm-trees, her form light and graceful as that of a young hart, her teeth (white) as a flock of sheep, which come up from the washing; her eyes as doves upon brooks of waters; they said that the odour of her renown was as sweet as the perfume that exhaled from her garments; that she was the lily of virgins and the object of women's praise.* Passing then to the eulogium of the bridegroom, they praised his mien, *majestic and imposing as Lebanon, the mildness of his voice, the gracious urbanity of his manners, and they added, that he was distinguished amongst men as the cedar amongst trees.* Then, proceeding to matters of a higher and more general nature, they said that the husband ought to be to his wife as *the bunc of myrrh which she wears on her bosom; that she ought to pass through life resting on him, and as heedless of all other men as though she were in a desert, because that jealousy is inflexible as death, and its lamps are lamps of fire and flame.* They added, that conjugal love was a thing so precious that *the richest of men, were he to buy it at the expense of all he possessed, might still reckon that he had it for nothing.*

Now and then the young people, who brought up the rear,

* See Fleury. *Mœurs des Israelites.*

† The music of the East is altogether different from ours. It is grave and simple, without any laboured modulation. All the instruments play together, unless one may take the notion of keeping up a continued bass, by repeating incessantly the same note. (Niebuhr, vol. 1, page 136.)

‡ This crown, which, according to the Jewish doctors, contained a mysterious lesson, was composed of salt and sulphur. The salt was clear as crystal, and upon it were traced various characters with the sulphur. (*Codez, M. S. apud Wagenseil in Misnam. Tit. Sotah, adul. de uxore suspect., c. 9, sec. 14.*)

formed dances of the same kind as the religious dance, which was associated, in its origin, with the religious festivals.* Again, they would burst out into those shrill and prolonged cries of joy still in use amongst the Arabs,† which are compared by a recent traveller in Syria to the loud shouts wherewith the vine-dressers of southern France accost their brethren on an opposite hill. The whole procession, as it passed along, scattered small pieces of silver‡ amongst the poor, who were loud in their blessings and gratulations. These silver coins bore either the device of a vine-leaf, or the three ears of corn which were the emblem of Judea.§ The women of Israel, grouped along the wayside, strewed palm-branches before the bride and bridegroom, and now and then they stopped the former to sprinkle her garments with essence of roses.¶ Mary, too, was to have her day of triumph in Jerusalem.

Arrived at the nuptial dwelling, the friends of the bride and bridegroom cried in chorus, *Blessed be he who cometh!* Joseph covered with his taled, and Mary with her veil, sat side by side under the canopy; Mary taking the right side—because the Psalmist said, *the queen (thy spouse) stood on thy right hand,*||—and turning towards the south.** The bridegroom placed a ring upon her finger,†† saying, *Behold, thou art my spouse according to the law of Moses and of Israel.* He took off his taled and threw it over the shoulders of the bride, in imitation of what passed at the marriage of Ruth, who said to Booz, *Spread thy coverlet over thy servant.*‡‡ One of the nearest kinsmen then poured wine into a cup, tasted

* Dancing, which, in its origin, was intended to imitate the motion of the stars, mingled in all the religious feasts of antiquity. It was, doubtless, of antediluvian origin, and must even have preceded the invention of musical instruments.

† See Niebuhr, book quoted.

‡ Basnage, l. vii., ch. 21.

§ Some of these Jewish coins have been found of the time of Herod and the Macabees. They bear the effigy of no prince, but merely ears of corn and vine-leaves.

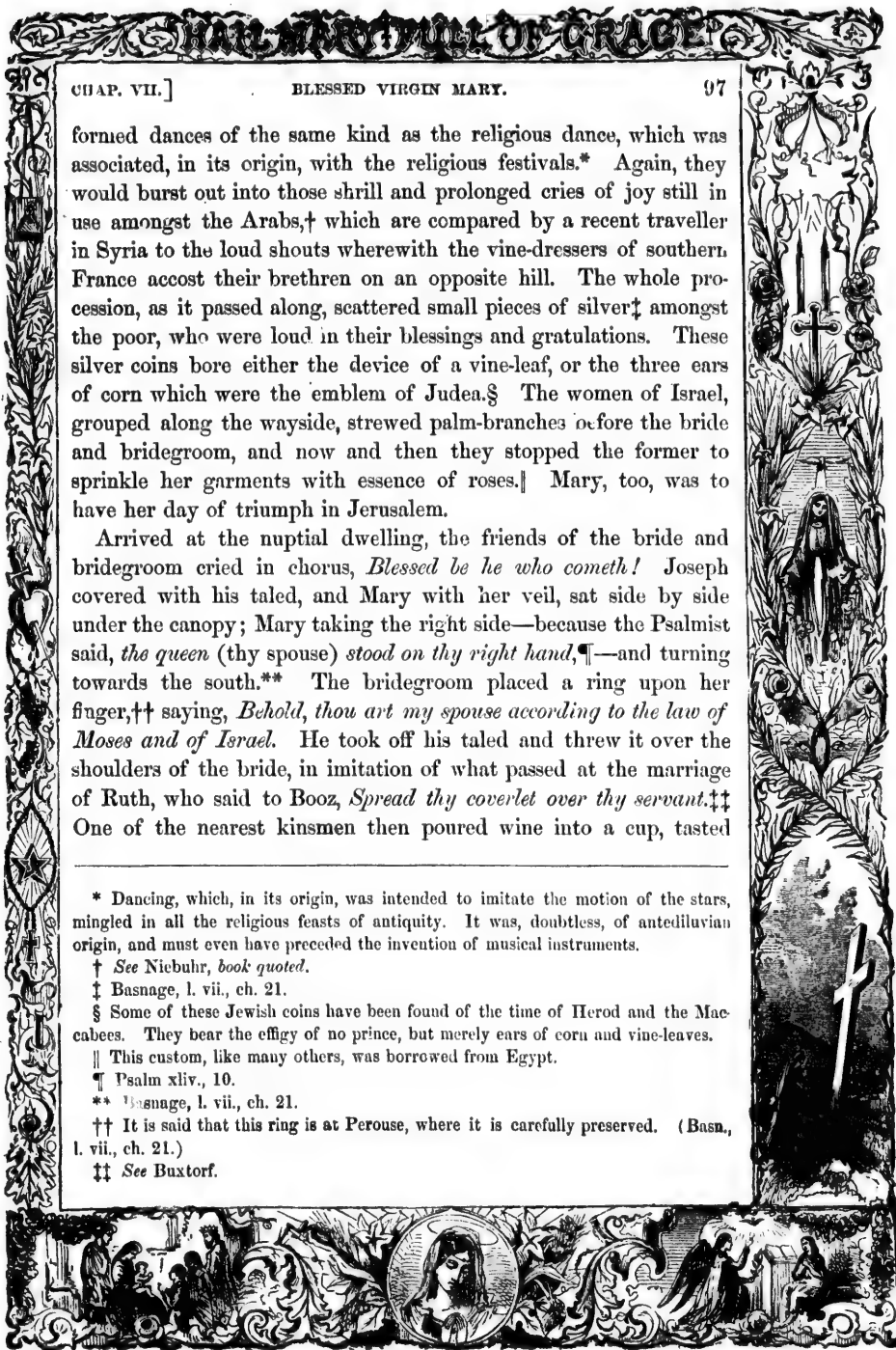
|| This custom, like many others, was borrowed from Egypt.

¶ Psalm xlv., 10.

** Basnage, l. vii., ch. 21.

†† It is said that this ring is at Perouse, where it is carefully preserved. (Basn., l. vii., ch. 21.)

‡‡ See Buxtorf.



of it, and then presented it to the new-married pair, blessing God for having created man and woman, and instituted marriage. Whilst they carried to their lips the sacred marriage-cup, the assistants sang to the God of Israel a hymn which contained six blessings. Joseph then poured out the remainder of the wine in token of liberality, and the assembly scattered handfuls of wheat, as the symbol of abundance; then the cup was broken to pieces by a child.*

All the assembly, surrounding the newly-married pair with torches, blessed the Lord, and then passed on to the banquet-hall, where they proceeded (according to an ancient bishop of Bresse,† who traces back this Hebrew tradition to the day of Christ) to choose the king of the feast, who was to be of the sacerdotal race, and to preside over the meats and the wines, and to see that the guests did not infringe on the rules of religion and propriety. Joseph and Mary also arose; but, before they followed their guests, they exchanged a few secret words in face of the firmament with all its stars, which attest the glory of the Most High.‡ *Thou shalt be as a mother unto me*, said the patriarch to the holy Virgin, and *I will respect thee even as the altar of Jehovah*. Thenceforward they were no more, in the eyes of religious law, than brother and sister in marriage, though their union was strictly maintained.§

Those festivals, which were accompanied by the religious ceremony of sacrifice, lasted seven days, as in the time of the patriarchs.

* Basnage, l. vii., ch. 21. *Instit. de Moïse*, l. vii., ch. i., p. 336.

† Gaudent., Sermon. 9, B. P., t. ii., p. 38.

‡ St. Thomas is of opinion that it was immediately after the celebration of their marriage that St. Joseph and the blessed Virgin made, by mutual consent, their vow of virginity.

§ This vow of chastity in married life, which has given rise to so much impious sarcasm, was not unknown amongst the Hebrews; but with them it was dictated by passion and anger, whilst that of these holy spouses was the result of piety. If a husband said to his wife, *Thou art as my mother*, he was never again allowed to consider her in any other light; especially, if he had introduced into his vow the altar of Jehovah, the temple, or the sacrifice. Women sometimes did the same thing. And although these vows were scarcely approved of, because they proceeded from wrath and malediction, they were still considered binding, and had to be religiously fulfilled. (Basn., l. vii., ch. 1^o, p. 352. Leo of Modena, *Ceremon. et Cont. des Juifs*, ch. 4.)

The week being ended, Joseph and Mary, escorted by a brilliant cavalcade of their relations, took the way to Galilee. The little caravan set out to the merry sound of cymbals, and only broke up at the fountain of Anathot,* where those of Jerusalem took leave of the newly-married pair, with tears in their eyes, blessings on their lips, and hands solemnly placed on their heart. The Nazarenes went on their way; they crossed the mountains of Samaria, where the eagle watched them from his eyrie on high, regardless of their presence. Sichem then presented itself to the eyes of the travellers, with its ever-green woods, its limpid streams, and its stately edifices rising above the foliage. They passed the reddish sides of the mountain of Garizim, where stood the ruins of the schismatic temple, the shameless rival of the holy house, which John Hircan had destroyed by fire, and which was afterwards replaced by a church dedicated to Mary herself; then the lofty heights of Mount Hebal; then Sebastes, where a new and stately palace was rising up under the protection of Augustus, and which Herod delighted to embellish, as the only altar whereon he might sacrifice to the genius of Rome.

Towards the middle of the second day's journey they distinguished the summit of Mount Thabor, raising its verdant head towards the pale and silvery sky of Galilee, and beyond, the towering heights of Lebanon, hiding their snowy peaks in the clouds. From the woody slopes of Hermon, where the goats were browsing on the tender shoots of the bushes, they descended into a smiling plain, which lay like an immense basket of flowers between hills covered with green oaks and myrtles, vineyards, and groves of olives. Fields of barley, wheat and clover, in full verdure, were gently waving in the cool fresh breeze of opening spring, warmer

and more rapid there than in our Western regions. The clear, bright sunlight lay on that lovely land, vegetation was rapidly progressing, and the blue waters, soon to be dried up by the

* All the relations went on horseback to escort the bride home, in case her husband's house was not far off. This is still customary amongst the Arabs. We have represented the bridal party as separating at Anathot, a small town about five leagues from Jerusalem, because it is the first stage.



scorching summer sun, were running in silvery brightness through that new Eden. Thriving villages were seen peeping out here and there between rows of stately palms, and at intervals, on the summit of a rock, was seated the solitary fortress whose garrison, Hebrews as yet, and charged with a protecting mission, drew their Damascus blades only against nocturnal marauders or the Arabs of the desert. This delightful valley, set, as it were, in the midst of high and gloomy mountains, was the vale of Esdrelon, and at its farther end appeared a small city picturesquely seated on the declivity of a hill, and shining pre-eminent over all the neighbouring hamlets; that fair and smiling town was Nazareth, the birth-place of Mary, the cradle of the Messiah !*

* The philosophers of the last century took great pains to depreciate Palestine. The impression which they gave of it still remains, while the poverty and depopulation of that country, scarcely breathing under the sabre of the Mussulman, has given them a show of reason in the eyes of superficial readers. Yet there is no doubt that, with the exception of the environs of Jerusalem, whose sterility no one can deny, we find in that country, and especially that part of it which formerly belonged to the Canaanites, the promised land of Moses. In proof of this assertion, we will give two descriptions of Galilee, written eight hundred years apart. "Galilee," says Flavius Josephus, "is divided into Upper and Lower, both extremely fertile; the soil is at once rich and light, and abounds in pasturage; it is suitable for every production, and filled with trees of every kind, but especially with large plantations of vines and olives. It is watered by the torrents which fall from the mountains, and by a vast number of springs and rivulets which are never exhausted, and supply the want of the torrents when these last are dried up during the heat of summer. The fertility of the soil is so great that it induces all men, even those who are least laborious, to cultivate it. Hence it is well tilled, and there is not a spot of waste land to be seen. Its inhabitants are robust and warlike, the cities frequent, the villages numerous, and so densely peopled that the smallest can reckon fifteen thousand souls." (Joseph. *de Bello*, lib. ii., cap. ii.) "To give an idea of the aspect of Galilee," says a modern traveller, speaking in his turn, "it is not in France that one can find a comparison, but in *l'Agro Romano*; around Nazareth, as around Rome, it is every where the same light, the same configuration of the soil. Nature is there as sublime as the Gospel itself. Galilee is an abridged picture of the Holy Land, and, when once we have seen it under the different aspects of day and night, we are able to understand what it must have been in the time of Christ. For the artist, Galilee is an Eden; nothing is deficient; neither the accidents of the soil of Judea, nor the luminous solitudes of Palestine, nor the verdant fecundity of Samaria, Garizim and the Mount of Olives, are not more sublime than Hermon and Thabor; nor are the blueish plains of Ascalon more solemn than the fragrant shores of the lake of Tiberias, where the air is absorbed in light. The Gali-



MAY FULL OF GRACE

CHAP. VII.]

BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

101

Doubtless, it was not without emotion that Mary once more beheld her native town, the memory of which, dimmed, but not effaced, had been . . . at to haunt her dreams. She had quitted it a child for the splendid walls of the temple; she returned fair, young, accomplished, and pure as when she left.

The travellers went into the house of St. Ann, an ancient and mysterious dwelling, partly hollowed from the rock like the prophetic grottoes of former times,* and which was soon to become holier than the temple at Jerusalem—the very dwelling-place of Jehovah. The women of Nazareth greeted the youthful bride with blessings as she modestly advanced, wrapped up in her veil like Rebecca of old; and Mary, amid the gratulations of those who had seen her in her early infancy, entered once more that calm paternal dwelling, which seemed still redolent with the good odour of the virtues of Ann and Joachim.

lean soil everywhere reminds us of history and miracles; everywhere it presents traces of heroes and the imprint of God; and one feels, in contemplating the land from the heights of Thabor, that it was the country where dwelt the Man-God; so strangely are religious reminiscences mingled with the marvels of earth and sky." (*Corres. l'Orient*, t. v)

* "There are still found in Nazareth," says the Baron Geramb, "houses like that of St. Joseph, that is to say, very low, and communicating with a cave excavated from the side of the mountain."



CHAPTER VIII.

THE ANNUNCIATION.

It is easy to imagine the blessed tranquillity in which Joseph and Mary passed the first months of their chaste union. The peace of God was in and around their humble dwelling, and their time was divided between labour and prayer, which sanctified and rendered it less rude. According to an ancient custom, still in use amongst the Arabs and nearly all over the East, Joseph wrought at his trade, in a house apart from his dwelling.* His workshop, the same in which Jesus himself subsequently worked, was a low room, ten or twelve feet in width by as many in length. Outside the door was a stone bench, whereon the passer-by might rest, sheltered from the burning rays of the sun by an awning of palm-leaf matting.† There it was that the laborious workman fabricated ploughs, yokes and rustic cars. Sometimes he put up the cabins of the valley, and at times his arm, still stout and strong, hewed down the lofty sycamore and the black turpentine-tree of Mount Carmel.‡ The pay which he received for so much toil was very trifling, and even that he shared with the needy.

On her side, his gentle and holy helpmate was not idle; gifted with a mind enlightened, wise and prudent, without regret for the past or delusive speculations for the future, seeing the world just as it is, and her own position in its true light, she piously conformed herself to it, and fulfilled with religious fidelity its sacred obligations.

* This house of St. Joseph is about 130 or 140 paces from that of St. Ann. The place is still pointed out, under the name of *Joseph's Workshop*. This shop had been transformed into a spacious church, a part of which was destroyed by the Turks. A chapel still remains, wherein the Holy Sacrifice is daily offered up. (*Pèlerinage à Jerusalem*, par le R. P. Geramb.)

† These shops are still the same all over the Levant. (*See Burchart, Voyage en Arabie*, t. i.)

‡ St. Justin, Martyr (*Dialog. cum Triphone*), mentions that Jesus helped his adoptive father to make yokes and ploughs. St. Ambrose (*in Luc.*, lib. iii., 2) asserts that St. Joseph worked at the hewing and felling of trees, the building of houses, and other works of that kind.





From the moment she took possession of her mother's dwelling, she clothed herself with poverty as with a garment sent by God, and became, what she ought to be, in the obscure condition to which Providence had reduced her, an humble and unassuming maiden. All the gay and brilliant works of elegant life were suddenly put aside, and replaced by the arduous cares, the monotonous occupations of a poor household, whose mistress has neither slaves nor servants. The delicate hands of Mary, accustomed to handle silken tissues, plaited, with date-leaves, or reeds pulled on the banks of Jordan, the mat which covered the earthen floor of her dwelling. Her spindle was charged with the coarsest flax. She had herself to grind the wheat and barley,* which she kneaded into round thin cakes. Wrapt in her white veil, an antique urn on her head,† she went to draw water from a neighbouring fountain,‡ like the wives of the old patriarchs, or to wash her blue robes in the running stream, like the princesses of Homer.

* The first mills that were invented were hand-mills. In Egypt, in Arabia, in Palestine, and even in Greece, it was the women who worked them. There is still shown at Mecca, in a fine house which is said to have been that of Khadidje, a cavity wherein Fatima, surnamed *the dazzling*, daughter of Mahomet, turned her hand-mill. (See Burckhart, *Voyage en Arabie*.) The wives of the Arab Cheiks have still to perform this laborious duty. In the time of the sons of Clovis, St. Radegonde, queen of France, ground, in imitation of the blessed Virgin, all the grain that she used during Lent. (Le Grand d'Aussy, *Hist. prisee des Français*.) The invention of water-mills is attributed to Mithridates. It is certain that they have existed from his time. Amongst other proofs of this, that pretty epigram of Antipator of Thessalonica is quoted, and we will here give a translation of it. "Ye women, who have hitherto been employed in grinding our grain, sleep in peace and let your arms rest; it is no longer for you that the birds usher in the morning by their songs. Ceres has commanded the Naiads to do your work; they obey, and swiftly turn a wheel which, in its turn, moves the heavy mill-stones." The Romans did not perfectly succeed in making water-mills until Constantine had abolished slavery.

† These urns are enormous earthen pitchers of immoderate height. The Nazareans carry them on their head; and under such a weight, and sometimes with a child in their arms, they walked with astonishing lightness. (De Geramb, t. ii., p. 239.)

‡ This fountain is called in that country *Mary's Fountain*. Tradition says that the divine Mother of Jesus went habitually thither to draw what water she required; and it is easy to believe that such was the case, when we consider the scarcity of water in Nazareth. The path which leads to this fountain, where the pious mother of Constantine constructed fine basins and reservoirs, is bordered with nopals and fruit-trees (De Geramb, *place quoted*.)



Jesus, witnessing the toilsome avocations of this *strong woman*, frequently alluded to them in his parables, and these simple occupations of Mary are preserved in the Gospel tissue as a sea-flower is in amber. We there see the thrifty housewife putting the leaven in three measures of meal,* carefully sweeping over her house in search of something that she lost,† and patiently mending an old garment.‡ When Jesus seeks a similitude to recommend purity of heart, he draws it from the remembrance of her cleanliness who carefully washed *the inside and outside of the cup*;§ and we may guess that he thought of Mary when praising the offering of the widow *who giveth not of her abundance, but of her poverty*. Hence the chanter of Chio represents Justice under the likeness of his mother, a poor humble woman, carefully weighing the wool which she is going to spin for her own maintenance and that of her son, remaining just and honest towards the rich in the midst of all her poverty.

At nightfall,|| when the birds seek their lofty nests, Mary placed on a clean, bright table, the work of Joseph's hands, the little cakes of wheat and barley, the savoury dates, milk-meat, fruits and dry vegetables which composed the frugal meal of the descendant of the Jewish princes. These articles, plainly cooked, formed the principal food of the ancient Hebrews, a sober race, who at need could well content themselves with bread and water.¶ As to the Virgin, she lived on so little that ancient authors—lovers of the marvellous—thought she must have been fed by angels.

When Joseph, tired after the labours of the day, entered his humble home at sunset, he found his young spouse waiting to present the water which she had warmed to bathe his feet, and the clear, cold water from the fountain, in a vase free from all

* St. Luke, ch. xiii., v. 21, and St. Matthew, ch. xiii., 8, 33.

† *Ibid.*, ch. v., v. 36.

‡ *Ibid.*, ch. xv., v. 8.

§ *Ibid.*, ch. xi., v. 39.

|| In Israel, people eat after having worked, and late enough too. (Fleury, *Mœurs des Israélites*) The principal meal of Joseph and Mary was taken about six in the evening.

¶ *Ibid.*, p 61



unclean touch,* for the ablutions necessary before meals. That grave and simple man, with his fine patriarchal countenance, where the passions had left no trace, and that angelic maiden, so eager to serve him with the solicitude of a tender child, formed a group worthy of the golden age.†

Meanwhile the hour was come—the hour which the Eternal had marked out in his divine counsels for the Incarnation of his Son. The angel Gabriel, one of the four‡ who stand always before the Lord, received a mysterious mission which withdrew him for a time from the heavenly court. Assuming one of those radiant coverings of thick air wherewith the celestial spirits clothe themselves when they are to fall under the gross senses of the children of men,§ the angel left behind him the golden palaces and emerald walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, whose gates are twelve pearls,|| and spread his vast white wings,¶ his face all radiant with benignant joy; for he was bearing to earth a message of peace, and the holy angels take as much pleasure in the happiness of men as the wicked spirits do in their sufferings and their ruin.

Having crossed the measureless wastes of heaven, in which every star is an oasis, the angel who had foretold to Daniel the coming of the Messiah, and who was now setting out for the accomplishment of that great promise of God, directed his course with the

* Amongst the Jews there were numberless precautions to be taken for purifying the vessels in which water was drawn or food prepared. They were not only careful in regard to their having belonged to strangers, but they carried their scruples much farther still, for a thousand circumstances rendered them unclean. (*Misnah, Ordo Puritatum.*)

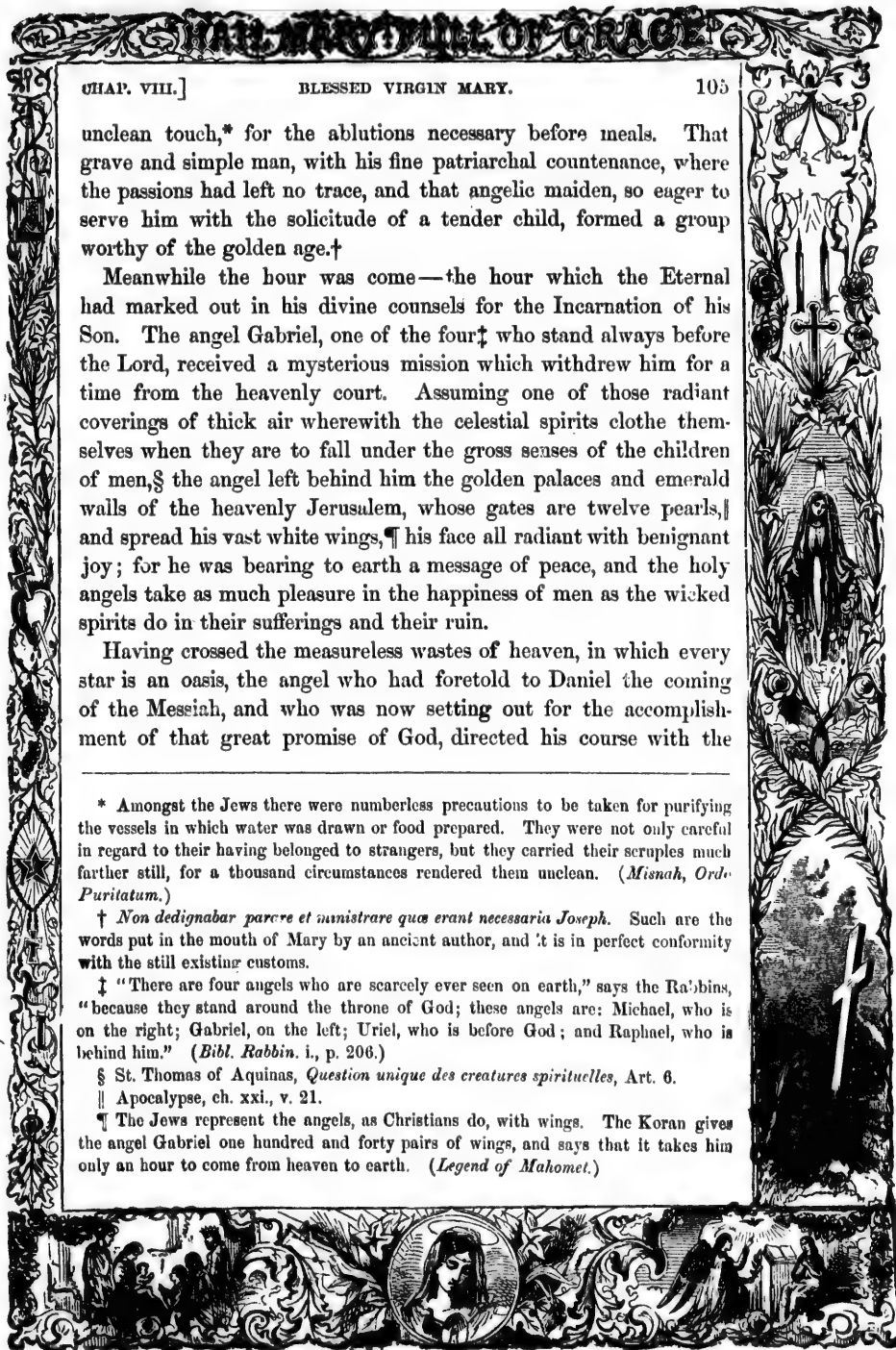
† *Non designabar parere et ministrare quæ erant necessaria Joseph.* Such are the words put in the mouth of Mary by an ancient author, and 't is in perfect conformity with the still existing customs.

‡ "There are four angels who are scarcely ever seen on earth," says the Rabbins, "because they stand around the throne of God; these angels are: Michael, who is on the right; Gabriel, on the left; Uriel, who is before God; and Raphael, who is behind him." (*Bibl. Rabbin. i., p. 206.*)

§ St. Thomas of Aquinas, *Question unique des creatures spirituelles*, Art. 6.

|| Apocalypse, ch. xxi., v. 21.

¶ The Jews represent the angels, as Christians do, with wings. The Koran gives the angel Gabriel one hundred and forty pairs of wings, and says that it takes him only an hour to come from heaven to earth. (*Legend of Mahomet.*)



rapidity of thought towards a little planet, which his piercing eye descried at an immense distance, first, in the state of a nebulous star; then shining with a pale milky light; then, at last, with the rotundity and tranquil light of the moon, whose phases it has.

On approaching this little globe, which man has proudly divided into zones and hemispheres—where he toils with senseless ardour to amass some treasures which he makes his god—the angel began to distinguish ponds of blue, shining water, surmounted by dark peaks like little submarine rocks. These were our oceans and our lofty mountains. The cities did not yet appear, nor men. At length the earth, which had first appeared under a microscopic form, gradually expanded into vast countries of many kingdoms, intersected with deserts, and planted with forests. Arrived at the zenith of Palestine, the angel cast a gracious glance on the pretty town of Nazareth, and, descending softly through the clouds after the manner of a falling star, he gracefully lowered himself to the humble, but holy dwelling of Joseph, the carpenter of Galilee, whose fathers were kings.

The sun was declining towards the lofty promontory of Carmel, and was soon to set behind the horizon of the Syrian Sea, when the angel presented himself in the simple oratory of the blessed Virgin.* Faithful to the religious customs of her people, Mary, her head turned towards the temple,† was then engaged in her evening prayer to the God of Jacob.‡ “Hail, full of grace,” said the heavenly messenger, bending his radiant head; “the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou amongst women.”

Mary was alarmed at this marvellous apparition. Perhaps she

* It is commonly believed that the angel's visit to the blessed Virgin took place about the close of the day.

† The people of the East turn towards a certain point of the heavens when they pray; this is what they call the *Kebla*. The Jews turn towards the temple of Jerusalem, the Mahometans towards Mecca, the Sabæans towards the south, and the Ghebers towards the rising sun.

‡ The Jews prayed three times a day; at sunrise in the morning, at three o'clock in the afternoon when sacrifice was offered, and in the evening at sunset. According to the Rabbins, Abraham established the morning prayer, Isaac that of the afternoon, and Jacob that of the evening. (Basnage, l. vii., ch. 17.)



feared, like Moses, to see God and die. Perhaps, as St. Ambrose thought, her virginal modesty was alarmed at sight of that son of heaven, who introduced himself, like a sunbeam, into that solitary cell, where no man ever entered. Perhaps it was the respectful attitude and splendid eulogium of the angel that disturbed her humility. However it was, the Gospel mentions that she was troubled within herself, and tried in vain to understand the object of that surprising visit, and the hidden meaning of that mysterious salutation.

The angel, perceiving her alarm, mildly said, "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father: and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever." At these words, which would have overwhelmed another with joy, the chaste and prudent Mary thought only of her virginal wreath, which she was resolved never to tarnish, and inquired how this prediction was to be reconciled with her vow of perpetual chastity.*

Virginal purity is a thing so holy in the eyes of the angels that Gabriel, in order to reassure Mary, feared not to reveal a part of the chaste mystery of the Incarnation. "The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee," said he, "and the Holy which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God."[†]

* Calvin, that haughty heresiarch, who burned Servetus while preaching toleration, dared to calumniate the Virgin, taking occasion from this text to accuse her of incredulity. St. Augustine had met the objection long beforehand. "The Virgin does not doubt," said he, "*non quasi incredula de oraculo* ; she only seeks to be informed as to how the miracle is to be wrought." St. John Chrysostom adds that this inquiry is the effect of respectful admiration, and not of vain curiosity.

† This Gospel record has been received by the Mussulmans themselves. Here is how the Koran relates the interview between the blessed Virgin and the angel. "The angel said unto Mary: 'God announces his Word to thee: he shall be called Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of Mary, great in this world and in the other, and the confident of the Most High; men shall hear his Word from infancy to old age, and he shall be numbered amongst the just.' 'Lord,' answered Mary, 'how could I have a son? I know not man.' 'Yet so shall it be,' replied the angel; 'God forms creatures as



Then, according to the custom of the heavenly ambassadors, he would give her a sign which should confirm the truth of his words. "And behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren: because no word shall be impossible with God."

Sarah had smiled an incredulous smile when the angel, seated under the or which shaded her tent, announced that she—old and barren—could bear a son. Mary, to whom a new prodigy was announced, a thing unprecedented under the sun—in fine, a virginal maternity—immediately believed the divine promise, and humbling herself before Him who exalted her above all women, she answered submissively, "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord*, be it done unto me according to thy will!" At these words the angel disappeared, and the WORD WAS MADE FLESH to dwell amongst us.* Thus it was that the angel of light treated of our salvation with the second Eve, when the crime of the guilty Eve, who had conspired our ruin with the infernal angel, was gloriously repaired. Thus it was that a simple mortal was raised to the unequalled dignity of Mother of God, and that, virgin and mother both together, she united by a new miracle the two most opposite and sublime states of her sex. "Let us dive no farther into this mystery," says St. John Chrysostom, "or seek to know how the Holy Ghost could work this prodigy in the Virgin; that divine generation is an unfathomable abyss which no curious glance may sound."†

We have adopted the opinion of the doctors and theologians who maintain that Joseph was legally the spouse of Mary at the time of the Incarnation. Yet this opinion is controverted; and amongst the authorities who pretend that Mary was not yet the spouse, but only the betrothed of Joseph, we find in the first rank the great St. John Chrysostom himself.‡ Still, Mary was living in

he pleases; if he wills that any thing should exist, he says, Be done, and it is done.' " (Ko., ch. iii.)

* The mystery of the Incarnation took place on the 25th of March, on a Friday evening, according to Father Drexelius.

† St. John Chrysostom, *Ser. 4.*

‡ Descoutures has erred in placing St. John Chrysostom amongst those who main-

the house of Joseph, according to the same Father, at the moment of the Annunciation. "For," says that illustrious doctor, "in former times it was customary for betrothed brides to reside in the house of the intended husband, which is still occasionally done. We see that the sons-in-law of Lot dwelt in the house of their future father-in-law."*

Notwithstanding her profound respect for St. John Chrysostom, the Church has not adopted his opinion. The example of the sons-in-law of Lot, which he brings forward to prove his case, is badly chosen. Scripture nowhere says that they lived with Lot; and all goes to prove the contrary, since the patriarch was obliged to *go out*, at a moment of terror and consternation, whilst the wicked city was in an uproar, to warn *his sons-in-law that were to have his daughters*. Even supposing that these young men had formed a part of Lot's family, since the flocks of that patriarch covered the hills and valleys of an entire province, they would have been; on the banks of the Jordan, precisely what Jacob was in Mesopotamia, active and vigilant servants, *day and night parched with heat, and with frost*.† We nowhere see that they had their betrothed in their tents; they lived under the protection of the patriarch, whose chief shepherds they were; there is nothing in this contrary to the customs of Asia. The blessed Virgin, being an orphan and alone in the world, would have been in an awkward position, residing in the house of her betrothed husband. Such a supposition could only be authorized by a general custom amongst the Hebrews, and we find in their code an express law against it.‡ St. Chrysostom himself tells us, and in this he fully agrees with the ancient theologians, that God long covered with an impenetrable veil the miraculous maternity of Mary, in order to save her from a revolting suspicion, which would have been as hurtful to the divinity of the Son as to the universal respect due to the Mother.

tain that Joseph was legally the husband of Mary at the time of the Incarnation; that writer, who is in general very judicious, probably quoted him from supposition

* St. John Chrysostom, *Serm.* 4.

† *Gen.*, ch. xxxi., v. 40.

‡ *Misnah*, t. iii., *de Sponsalibus*. Selden, *Uxor Hebraica*.

Now, marriage alone could cover with its honoured mantle the mystery of the Incarnation, for a mere betrothal would not have sufficed. And then, if Joseph and Mary had been only betrothed at the time of the Incarnation of the Word, they would have been nothing more four months after, since the Gospel mentions that Mary, after the Annunciation, set out *with haste* to visit St. Elizabeth, and that it was only on her return from Hebron, after an absence of three months, that *she was found with child*, a phrase which indicates a position visible to all. Are we to suppose that the marriage of the Virgin was only celebrated when her maternity was known and established? What would the two families have thought? What would the people of Nazareth have said as they thronged to witness the ceremony? What insulting remarks would have been applied to the most pure Virgin, amongst a people with whom female chastity was so sacred that its violation was inevitably punished with death! Would not the birth of the Messiah—that birth which was to be *pure as the morning-dew*—have been tainted and defiled by this foul slander? Would not the Jews, and especially those of Nazareth, who were so much opposed to Christ, and who called him *the carpenter's son*—would they not have taunted him with the irregularity of his birth? But this they did not do, and the evident conclusion is that they could not do it.

Here, then, undoubtedly, are the reasons which induced many illustrious theologians to hold that Mary was really married, notwithstanding the support which the opposite party seem to find in the words of St. Matthew—words which would seem to favour the other interpretation—but which are far from being so precise as to resolve the difficulty.* Finally, the dispute has never turned on

* The verse which has divided the doctors is this: *Christi autem generatio sic erat: cum esset desponsata mater ejus Maria Joseph, antequam convenirent, inventa est in utero habens de Spiritu Sancto.* Those who dwell on the meaning of these words say that the Virgin was only betrothed, because the Greek verb which renders the Hebrew expression of St. Matthew means *desponderi*, to be promised, and because there is another term signifying to be married, just as there are amongst the Latins *desponderi* and *nubere*, so that St. Joseph had not yet taken the Virgin to his house. This they prove by that part of the 20th verse, *Noli timere accipere Marian: conjugem tuam: quod enim in ea natum est, de Spiritu Sancto est*, which they thus explain: "Fear not



HAIL MARY FULL OF GRACE

CHAP. VIII.]

BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

111

the principal point. Whether wife or betrothed, no true Christian has ever doubted that the Mother of God was the purest and holiest of virgins. The Mussulmans themselves agree that she was the source and mine of purity.*

to take Mary for thy wife, for what is conceived in her is conceived by the operation of the Holy Ghost. But in order to translate thus, there must be, *in conjugem tuam*. The opposite party, who are sustained by many of the Fathers, by respectable commentators, and nearly all the theologians, find wherewith to combat their opponent: in the second chapter of St. Luke, where, notwithstanding that the Virgin was already married to Joseph, the Evangelist employs the Greek term *ἐμψυγχεσθαι*, which signifies *being promised*, and says, *Ut profiteretur cum Maria desponsata sibi uxre prægnante*: to the end that he might have an understanding with his betrothed wife, who was with child. And in the 19th verse of the first chapter of St. Matthew, St. Joseph is called *vir ejus* (her husband) and not her betrothed. Although St. Matthew calls the blessed Virgin *sponsa* (betrothed) and she a wife, that does not prove that she had not yet contracted marriage; it is merely to show, as one of the Fathers remarks, that she had no closer connection with her spouse than if she was only his betrothed.

* The purity of Mary is fully recognised by the Mussulmans; hence we find that Abou-Ishac, ambassador from the Caliph to the court of the Greek Emperor, being present at a religious conference with the patriarch and the Greek bishops, the latter reproached the Mussulmans with many slanderous stories which had been formerly circulated against Aischah, the widow of their prophet, which had occasioned grievous disputes amongst them. Whereupon Abou-Ishac replied that these disputes were not to be wondered at, seeing that, amongst Christians, there had been so much difference of opinion regarding the glorious Mary, mother of Jesus, "who may be called," said he, "the mine and source of all purity," *genab ismet mealo k'm ofet*. (D'Herbelot, *Biblioth. Orientale*, t. ii., p. 620.)



CHAPTER IX.

THE VISITATION.

MEANWHILE, Mary, informed by the angel of the miraculous pregnancy of Elizabeth, resolved on going to offer her tender congratulations to her venerable relative. It was not, as heretics have dared to assert, that the Virgin wished to have ocular demonstration of the reality of that extraordinary event. She knew that nothing is impossible to God, and could not suppose that an envoy from heaven would bring her words of falsehood and deceit from the Most High. She set out, not to assure herself, but because she was sure. She set out with haste, because charity, says St. Ambrose, admits neither hesitation nor delay; and because, with her wonted kindness and benevolence, she longed to impart to the venerable guardians of her childhood a portion of that sanctification, and of those celestial graces, which sprang from her soul, as from a source of living water, ever since she bore in her chaste womb the Creator of the world.

With the consent of St. Joseph, whose simple but elevated soul was in perfect unison with her own, Mary set out from Nazareth in the season of roses, and took her way towards the mountains of Judea, where Zachary, the Aaronite, had his dwelling. The Scripture, omitting details and barely mentioning facts, does not mention whether the Virgin was accompanied by any one on this journey. Some authors have thought that she travelled alone, which is altogether improbable. In fact, the distance from Nazareth to the city of Ain* is five days' journey. There was part of Galilee to be traversed, with the hostile country of Samaria, and nearly all the lands of Juda. Then, the country is bristling with mountains, intersected by foaming torrents, and interspersed with deserts.† The roads, which the Romans subsequently re-

* Zachary lived at Ain, or Aen, two leagues south of Jerusalem. St. Helen had a beautiful church erected on the site of his house.

† Although Judea was then far more populous than it now is, there were still some



paired, were at that time only beaten by the heavy foot-fall of the camels, and were covered with round stones, so that the traveller was at every step in danger of falling. Then, when night came, the wayfarer was obliged to put up in some caravansera, where there was nothing to be found but a small room covered with a rush-mat,* and no provisions of any sort; for the primitive hospitality had retrograded amongst the Hebrews in proportion to the advance of civilization. Such being the case, is it at all likely that a man of years and experience, like Joseph, would have wantonly exposed a young woman, fair, delicate, and totally unused to the ways of the world, to brave alone the thousand dangers of such a journey? Such a supposition is contrary to all the customs of Asia,† and especially of the people of God. Never was Jewish woman allowed to undertake such a journey without a fitting escort.

If St. Joseph, as Père Croiset thinks, could not accompany the blessed Virgin, it is probable that she would join some of her pious relatives who were going to the Holy City, and that she thus travelled in safe company. In fact, we always find her travelling with some of her friends, whether in going to Jerusalem to celebrate the grand festivals, or with the holy women, following Jesus during his missions, at a much later period of her life. "Although she could have had no better guardian than herself," says St. Ambrose, "yet she never went abroad without fitting company."‡

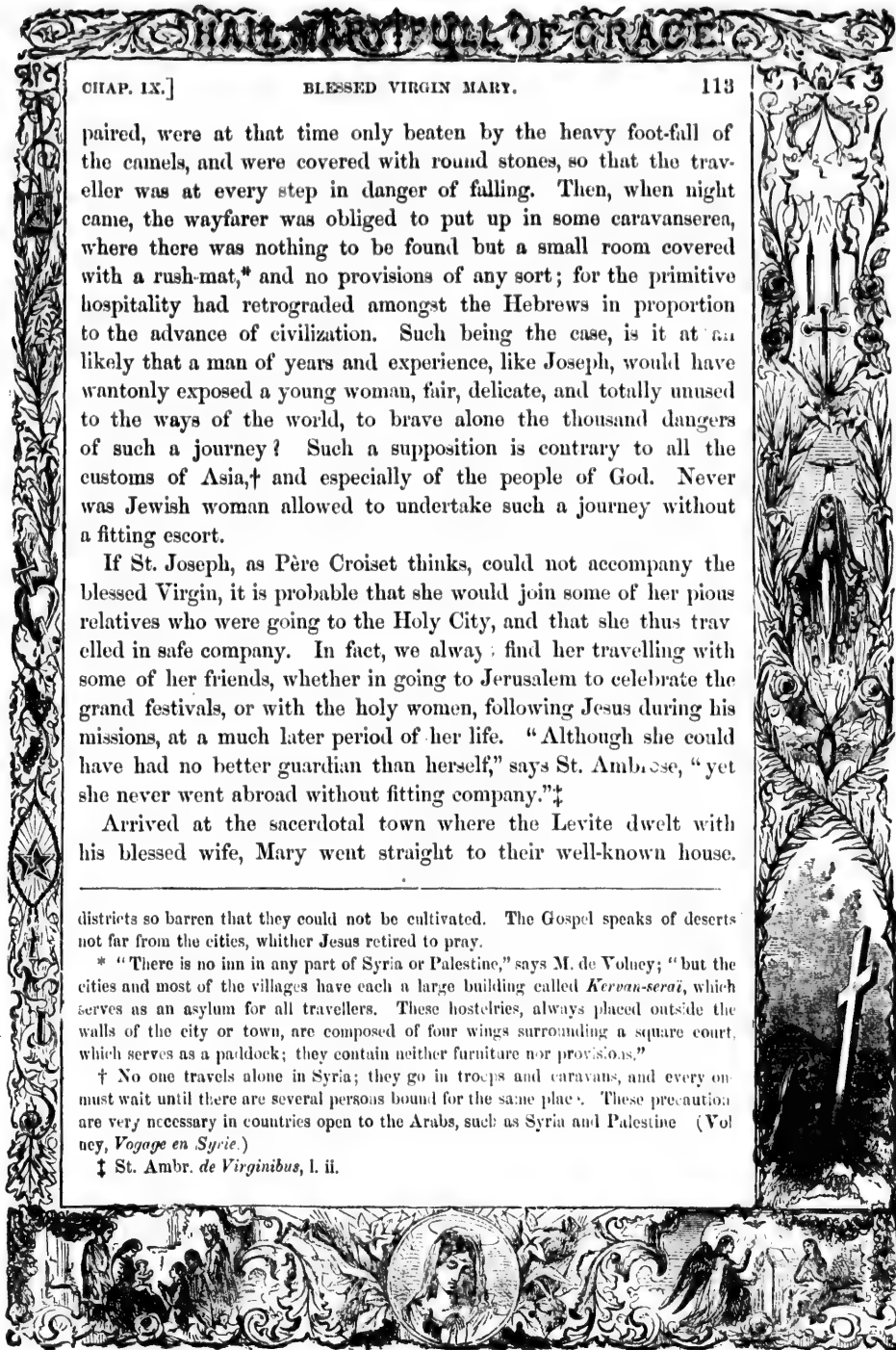
Arrived at the sacerdotal town where the Levite dwelt with his blessed wife, Mary went straight to their well-known house.

districts so barren that they could not be cultivated. The Gospel speaks of deserts not far from the cities, whither Jesus retired to pray.

* "There is no inn in any part of Syria or Palestine," says M. de Volney; "but the cities and most of the villages have each a large building called *Kervan-serai*, which serves as an asylum for all travellers. These hostelries, always placed outside the walls of the city or town, are composed of four wings surrounding a square court, which serves as a paddock; they contain neither furniture nor provisions."

† No one travels alone in Syria; they go in troops and caravans, and every one must wait until there are several persons bound for the same place. These precautions are very necessary in countries open to the Arabs, such as Syria and Palestine (Volney, *Voyage en Syrie*.)

‡ St. Ambr. *de Virginibus*, l. ii.



Elizabeth, apprised by a slave of her cousin's unexpected visit, came forth to meet her with every demonstration of joy.

On seeing her approach, the young Virgin bowed down, and laying her hand on her heart, *Peace be with you*, said she, eager to give the first salutation.* Elizabeth drew back. The pleased and friendly expression of her countenance gave place to that of profound respect. Her features kindled by degrees. It was plain that something strange and unusual was passing within her. The simple formula of politeness which the Virgin had pronounced in her low sweet voice destroyed Elizabeth's familiarity. Suddenly the prophetic spirit descended upon her, and she exclaimed, "*Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me?*" she added, "that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord."

Mary's answer was the sublime *MAGNIFICAT*, the first canticle of the New Testament, and the most beautiful in all the Scriptures.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour:

"Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

"For he that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is his name.

"And his mercy is from generation to generation, to them that fear him.

"He hath showed might in his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.

"He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.

"He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent away empty.

"He hath received Israel his servant, being mindful of his mercy.

"As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever."

It was thus that the Virgin suddenly saw, by a supernatural

* This salutation, so often used by Christ, is still common throughout the East. When two persons meet, after the usual greeting, "*Peace be with you (salem alaikom)*," they lay their hand on their heart. This salutation was in use in the days of Abraham (Savary, *Note on the 11th ch. of the Koran.*)

light, those ancient prophecies and their perfect accomplishment—herself a thousand times more enlightened and more privileged than all the prophets put together. “In that celebrated interview,” says St. Ambrose, “Mary and Elizabeth both prophesied by the Holy Ghost, with whom they were filled, and by the merit of their children.”

The Virgin remained three months in the country of the Hethites, within a short distance of the city of Ain, in the depth of a shady and fertile vale, where Zachary had his country-house.* It was then that the daughter of David—herself, too, a prophetess, and gifted with a genius equal to that of the illustrious founder of her race—could contemplate at her leisure the starry firmament the stately forests, and the vast ocean as it stretched in ever-changing majesty along the blueish coasts of Syria. The blessed Virgin never looked without emotion on those magnificent scenes of the creation. All the works of nature spoke to her heart of their great Author, and gently animated her soul after having charmed her eyes. The plain, which spread far and away towards the mountains of Arabia, the blue dome of heaven, rising like a tent over the habitations of men, gave her an idea of the immensity of the creating God; the rich yellow of the crops, the delicious fruitage, and the fresh mountain-spring announced to her his providence; the voice of the tempest, his power; the arrangement of the heavenly bodies, his wisdom; and his care over the birds of the air and the insects of the earth, his sovereign goodness.

In these rural excursions, she sometimes rested on the verge of a spouting spring, whose sparkling spray she loved to watch and to listen to the gurgling of its water. This spring, called Nephtoa in the time of Joshua, now bears the name of *Mary*.†

To the rear of the Hebrew pontiff's *villa* lay one of those gardens, called by the Persians *Paradise*, the arrangement of

* This country-house was within a short distance of Ain, in the depth of a pleasant and fertile valley which now serves as a garden for the village of St. John. There was formerly a church erected in this place in memory of the Visitation, but it is now nothing more than a heap of ruins.

† This fountain has so great an abundance of water that it irrigates and fertilizes the whole valley. Tradition says that Mary sometimes went thither. It was called Nephtoa in the days of Joshua; it now bears the name of the *Virgin's Fountain*.



which had been borrowed by the Jewish captives from the people of Cyrus and of Semiramis. In it were seen the most beautiful trees of Palestine; and the tufts of flowers thrown carelessly here and there through the glades, the sweet perfume of the orange-trees, the rivulet gliding along beneath the drooping branches of the willows, gave a thousand charms to the shade. There it was that Mary's mild persuasions made Elizabeth forget her fears for the issue of an event whose anticipation filled her with hope and joy, but which was full of danger to a woman of her advanced age. How pure, how lofty must have been the discourse of these two holy women! the one young, artless, and ignorant of evil, like Eve when she came from her Creator's hand; the other full of days, and enriched with a long experience of the things of life; both profoundly pious, and both well-pleasing to Jehovah: the one bearing in her womb—so long barren—a son who was to be a *prophet—yea, more than a prophet*; the other, the blessed germ of the Most High, the Chief and Liberator of Israel.

In the fine evenings of summer, when the silvery radiance of the moon brightened the foliage, the elegant meal of the family was spread beneath a large fig-tree, or under the green leaves of a spreading vine.* There was lamb, fed on the aromatic slopes of the mountains; fish, taken by the Sidonian fisherman; the wild honeycomb, from the hollow of some ancient oak; then, in green baskets, skilfully made of palm-leaves, were the dates of Jericho,† which figured even on the table of Cæsar; the apricots of Armenia, the pistachio-nuts of Aleppo, and the water-melons of Egypt: finally, the golden wine of Lebanon, the fragrant juice of vineyards in the far-off islands of the Cyprian Sea, and the wine from the hills of Engaddi, preserved by the steward in stone-jars,‡ was sparkling in costly cups. Mary, temperate as ever in

* The Hebrews made it a practice to eat in gardens, under trees and arbours; it is so natural, in warm countries, to seek the fresh air. (Fleury, *Mœurs des Israélites*, p. 101.)

† The dates of Syria and Judea are yellow and black, round like apples, and very sweet. Pliny reckons forty-nine sorts of dates.

‡ The Jews who are settled in Yemen still make use of these jars. (See Niebuhr, *Voyage en Arabie*.)



the midst of this profusion, contented herself with some fruit and a cup of water. Frugality was not in her a forced virtue, it was one of choice.*

Some, with a view to enhance the humility of the Virgin, which requires no such aid, have pretended that she acted as a *servant*, and almost as a slave towards St. Elizabeth.

This is mere folly. Elizabeth would never have permitted a woman whom she had herself proclaimed as the mother of her Lord, and whom she had loudly extolled beyond all the daughters of Sion, thus to humble herself before her. The holy spouse of Zachary† had no want of either servants or slaves. Christians and Jews all agree that this family was of distinguished rank, and the illustrious birth of St. John the Baptist seemed ever to throw some discredit on that of Jesus Christ, whose reputed parents were much more obscure, and lived the life of the common people.

The attentions which the mild and amiable Virgin lavished on Elizabeth had in them nothing of servility; they were just such attentions as she would have bestowed on her mother had heaven spared her to her; and we may, indeed, suppose that she was often reminded of her own parents by the sight of that loving, devoted, and venerable pair, who loved her so paternally, and who, after that first interview wherein her greatness was so marvellously revealed, never failed to treat her with a profound respect which Mary's humility would fain avert, but could never wholly destroy.

* With her, abstinence seemed no longer a privation; it was rather her custom not to make use of meat, if we may so speak. (P. Valverde, *Vie de Jesus Christ*, t. i, p. 6)

† Zachary was descended from Abdia, father of the eighth sacerdotal family. These ancient families were rare, several of them having remained in Persia after the captivity. Elizabeth was descended from Aaron and from David. The Jews place John the Baptist far above Jesus, because he passed his life in the desert and was the son of a pontiff. Jesus, on the contrary, was born of a poor woman, and seemed to them only an ordinary man. (St. J. Chrysos. in *Matt.*, Sermon 12.) The Mussulmans have retained a great idea of St. John the Baptist, whom they call *Jahia ben Zacaria* (John, son of Zachary). Saadi, in his *Gulistan*, makes mention of the sepulchre of St. John the Baptist, venerated in the mosque of Damascus. He himself had prayed there, and he mentions an Arabian king who had come there on a pilgrimage. "The Caliph Abdalmalek would fain buy that church from the Christians," says d'Herbelot, "and when they refused to take four thousand *pistoles* which he had offered them for it, he took it from them by force." (*Bibliothèque Orientale*, t. ii)



It is easy to imagine, say the Fathers, how many blessings were drawn down on this excellent family by the visit of the blessed Virgin. If the Lord blessed Obbedom and all that was his—even so as to excite the envy of the holy king David—for having had the ark of the covenant three months in his house, what blessings must not Zachary and his household have received from the three months' sojourn of *Her* of whom the ark of old was but the figure, so holy and so venerable was she? "The purity in which St. John passed his whole life," says St. Ambrose, "was the effect of that unction and of that grace infused into his soul by the presence of the blessed Virgin."

It is not precisely known whether the Mother of God assisted at the delivery of Elizabeth. Origen, St. Ambrose and other grave authors, both ancient and modern, pronounce in the affirmative, and their opinion is highly probable. It would, indeed, have been very strange if, after so long a visit to her cousin, Mary had suddenly left her at the critical time, and without any reasonable motive for such a hasty and untimely departure. Custom required that all the matrons of the family should be with the new mother to share in her happiness. We see by the Gospel that Elizabeth was surrounded by her friends on that solemn occasion, and that the birth of St. John the Baptist drew to his father's house a great number of friends and kinsfolk. It is objected that virgins were not usually present at such times, and the objection is very proper; but Mary was married, and therefore bound by certain rules of decorum, which she could not violate without going in express contradiction to customs which had been handed down from the patriarchal times. The retiring habits of the Virgin are also brought forward to prove that the very rumour of the festivals which were to celebrate the birth of the Precursor would have driven her away like a frightened dove. But Mary could easily reconcile her distaste for the world with that exquisite sense of propriety attributed to her by the Fathers, and her tender solicitude for her mother's niece. It is, then, most probable that she remained in the house of the pontiff until Elizabeth was out of danger; when, withdrawing herself from the admiration which



she never failed to excite, she quitted the mountains of Judea, after having embraced and blessed the new Elias.*

A religious author observes that the blessed daughter of Joachim went with haste to visit her cousin, but that she slowly and reluctantly departed from those fresh valleys whose oaks had sheltered angels.† Perhaps, like the sea-bird, she had a presentiment of the coming storm.

* Some theologians, embracing an opinion contrary to that of Origen and St. Ambrose, maintain their position by quoting that passage of St. Luke which only mentions the delivery of Elizabeth after having brought the Virgin back to Galilee. It seems to us that the subject demanded more reflection than these writers seem to have bestowed upon it. For ourselves, we have carefully examined the Gospel of St. Luke, and that minute investigation has convinced us that the proof brought forward is any thing but conclusive; for it is the manner of St. Luke to make just such transpositions, as we can show by two instances of a similar kind. For instance, after having followed the preaching of St. John the Baptist and announced his imprisonment, St. Luke speaks, in the following verse, of the baptism of Jesus Christ, which is well known to have taken place long before the Precursor was cast into prison. In recounting the adoration of the shepherds, St. Luke enlarges on their marvellous accounts of their visit to the grotto of Bethlehem, and the astonishment wherewith they were heard; then, returning all at once to the scene of the adoration, he speaks of their departure from the stable. This, then, is our reason for adopting the opinion of St. Ambrose, which, of itself, is altogether the most probable. Father Valverde, who has closely studied the holy Fathers, is also of opinion that the blessed Virgin did not leave her friends till she had seen and blessed the young Precursor of the Messiah.

† In the vale of Mambre, which is but six stadas from Hebron, there was still to be seen, in St. Jerome's time, a tree of enormous thickness, said to be the identical tree under which Abraham received the visit of the three angels, who came to announce to him the birth of Isaac



CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN FROM HEBRON.

On her return to Nazareth, Mary cheerfully resumed her plebeian life, and the toilsome occupations which she had to suspend during her long visit. She became again the active and diligent young housewife, who finds time for work, time for prayer, time for pious reading; whose whole conversation was in heaven, and who seemed to have applied to herself those wise and beautiful words of the Psalmist, "All the glory of the king's daughter is within." Meantime she was advancing in her virginal pregnancy, and Joseph began to wax jealous.

The high and upright mind of the patriarch was tortured with doubt and grievous perplexity. At first he could not believe his eyes, and thought it more just to distrust the evidence of his senses than the purity of a woman who had always appeared to him a prodigy of holiness and purity. But Mary's condition became daily more evident. *She was found with child*, says the Gospel; which means that all Nazareth knew the fact, and that Joseph's friends, in the simplicity of their heart, came to offer their cruel congratulations, which he had to receive with a show of composure, while they gave a crushing certainty to what he had himself suspected. According to the Proto-gospel of St. James, he prostrated himself before God, bathed in tears, in the first paroxysm of his grief, and cried out, "Who has betrayed me? who has brought evil into my house?" Then, yielding to his tenderness for the young orphan, whom he had always regarded as the pearl and glory of her sex, he bitterly accused himself for not having taken more care of her. "Alas!" said he to himself, "my history is that of Adam; when he rested most securely in his glory and happiness, Satan suddenly beguiled Eve by deceitful words and seduced her." When his mind became calm enough to reflect, he found himself in a most painful predicament.

* Proto-gospel of St. James, in the Apocryph of Fabric., . i., p. 97.

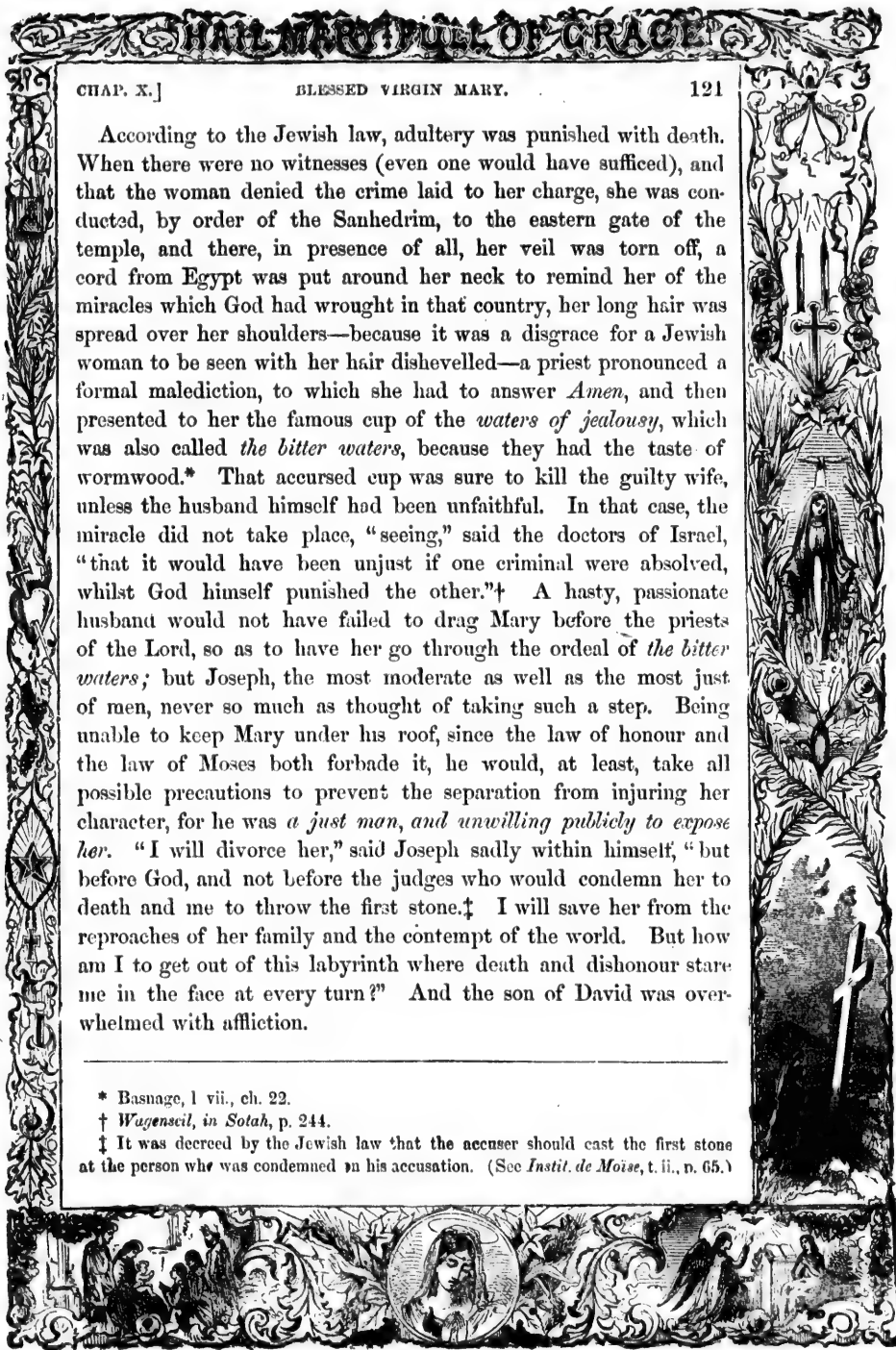


According to the Jewish law, adultery was punished with death. When there were no witnesses (even one would have sufficed), and that the woman denied the crime laid to her charge, she was conducted, by order of the Sanhedrim, to the eastern gate of the temple, and there, in presence of all, her veil was torn off, a cord from Egypt was put around her neck to remind her of the miracles which God had wrought in that country, her long hair was spread over her shoulders—because it was a disgrace for a Jewish woman to be seen with her hair dishevelled—a priest pronounced a formal malediction, to which she had to answer *Amen*, and then presented to her the famous cup of the *waters of jealousy*, which was also called *the bitter waters*, because they had the taste of wormwood.* That accursed cup was sure to kill the guilty wife, unless the husband himself had been unfaithful. In that case, the miracle did not take place, “seeing,” said the doctors of Israel, “that it would have been unjust if one criminal were absolved, whilst God himself punished the other.”† A hasty, passionate husband would not have failed to drag Mary before the priests of the Lord, so as to have her go through the ordeal of *the bitter waters*; but Joseph, the most moderate as well as the most just of men, never so much as thought of taking such a step. Being unable to keep Mary under his roof, since the law of honour and the law of Moses both forbade it, he would, at least, take all possible precautions to prevent the separation from injuring her character, for he was *a just man, and unwilling publicly to expose her*. “I will divorce her,” said Joseph sadly within himself, “but before God, and not before the judges who would condemn her to death and me to throw the first stone.‡ I will save her from the reproaches of her family and the contempt of the world. But how am I to get out of this labyrinth where death and dishonour stare me in the face at every turn?” And the son of David was overwhelmed with affliction.

* Basnage, l. vii., ch. 22.

† *Wagenseil, in Sotah*, p. 244.

‡ It was decreed by the Jewish law that the accuser should cast the first stone at the person who was condemned in his accusation. (See *Instit. de Moïse*, t. ii., p. 65.)



Mary could not but see the gloomy dejection of the just man to whom God had confided her, and certainly it must have cost her much to conceal from him the glorious embassy of the angel. But how was she to communicate an event so strange, so miraculous as that of her divine maternity, and without other proof than her own assertion? Justly persuaded that the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word must be revealed by supernatural means in order to be believed, and leaving to HIM who had wrought such great things in her the care of convincing Joseph of her innocence, "the daughter of David," says the great bishop of Meaux, "at the risk of seeing herself not only suspected and abandoned, but also lost and dishonoured, left all to God and remained in peace."

The Eternal, from the height of his starry throne, cast a look of compassion on the just man whom he had made to undergo so hard a trial,* before raising him to the supreme honour of being his representative on earth; and the angels, with their eyes fixed on the holy house of Nazareth, anxiously awaited the result of that secret struggle wherein humanity, duty, and the noblest feelings of the soul were engaged. At length, the patriarch conceived an idea so generous, so heroic as almost to place him on a level with the Queen of Angels. He resolved to sacrifice his honour, the respect which he had gained by his spotless life, the means of existence which furnished his daily bread, and the air of his native land, so necessary to the aged, in order to save the reputation of a wife who did not even seek to justify herself, and who was so cruelly condemned by appearances. There was but one way to leave Mary without ruining her, for her family would have provoked explanations which must have ended fatally. It was, to expatriate himself, to go leave his bones in a foreign land, and to take upon himself all the odium of such a desertion. There is a species of resignation which is in itself a glorious triumph, and

* "Undoubtedly," says Bossuet (*Elev. sur les Myst.*), "God could have abridged these sufferings of Joseph by sooner revealing to him the mystery of Mary's pregnancy; but his virtue would not then have been put to the proof. We should not have seen Joseph triumph over the most indomitable of all passions, and the most rational jealousy that ever was would not have been cast down at the feet of virtue."

there are sorrows which, if patiently endured, Heaven repays as munificently as martyrdom itself. Of this class was the unknown sacrifice of the Virgin's spouse. In order to reconcile his duty and his humanity, he accepted beforehand the ignominious character of a heartless husband, an unfeeling father, a man without conscience, and without faith. He accepted the contempt of his neighbours, the mortal hatred of Mary's friends, and resolved to give up his good name for the sake of her whose mysterious and unaccountable position filled his heart with sorrow and made his life miserable.

St. John Chrysostom delights to dwell on the admirable conduct of St. Joseph. "It was expedient," says that great saint, "that coming on the time of our Saviour there should appear many marks of greater perfection than the world had yet dreamed of. Thus, when the sun is about to rise, the East assumes a brilliant colouring long before the first streak of day has reached the horizon; so did Jesus Christ, about to emerge from the womb of the Virgin, already shed light on the world. Hence it was that, even before that divine birth, prophets leaped for joy in their mother's womb, women prophesied, and Joseph manifested a superhuman degree of virtue."

We have here adopted the opinion of St. John Chrysostom in preference to that of St. Bernard, who supposes that Joseph penetrated of himself the mystery of the birth of Christ, and that, seeing Mary pregnant, he doubted not—in his profound veneration for her—that she must be the miraculous Virgin of Isaiah. "He believed it," says the Apostle of the Crusades, "and it was only from a sentiment of humility and respect like unto that which made St. Peter afterwards say, *Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man*, that St. Joseph, not less humble than St. Peter, thought of leaving the Virgin, not doubting that she would be pregnant of the Saviour of mankind."

This interpretation—a very pious one, indeed, and worthy of him who was honoured with the title of *devout chaplain of Mary*—is yet more in accordance with the ascetic notions of the middle ages than with the customs of the ancient Hebrews, and will not stand a close investigation. In fact, the words of the Evangelist are so clear that it takes no small industry to make them obscure.



It is not at all that instinctive feeling of religious awe, which makes us shrink from a religious object, that suggests to Joseph the idea of leaving Mary; it is the prompting of conscience and of duty. "He was just," says Bossuet, "and his justice would not permit him to remain in the company of a woman whom he could no longer believe innocent. As for his suspecting what had happened by the operation of the Holy Ghost, it was a miracle as yet unexampled, and could by no means present itself to the human mind."

The words of the angel would no longer have a meaning, and would savour of falsehood—which could not be the case—if St. Bernard's hypothesis were carried out. "Fear not," said the ambassador of God, "to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Does Joseph proclaim his unworthiness at the moment when he is made certain that Mary bears in her womb the very Author of nature? Does he reveal to the angel those scruples which must now be more urgent than ever? Does he beg that the cup of honour, presented to him by the celestial messenger, may pass to some worthier mortal? He does nothing of the kind. The storm of his soul is suddenly hushed, and he falls into that profound calm which follows great moral tempests.

Some will have it that the prophecies relating to the Messiah were familiar to Joseph, as to all the Hebrews; that he must have been aware that the time of the Messiah was at hand, and that he must have known at first sight, considering the sanctity of Mary, that she bore in her womb the Saviour of the world. But the understanding of those prophecies was then far from being as easy as may now be imagined. Whether it was that Isaiah's allegorical descriptions of the glorious reign of Emmanuel had led the synagogue into error, or that the carnal mind of the Jews could not raise itself above the earth and earthly things, it is certain that the Hebrew people, that *hard-headed people*, had taken a wrong view of the subject, and did not choose to be set right. The ambassador of God, the desired of the nations, was to be a legislator, a great captain, a monarch magnificent and powerful as Solomon. The Apostles themselves were long mistaken as to the humble and pacific mission of *the poor King, who passed*



silently along. They were seen to flatter themselves with gilded visions and kingdoms in perspective, even in sight of that decide city where their Master was to be put to death. It was not without an effort that our Lord brought them back to spiritualism, and rectified their ideas, ever ready to return within the narrow channel of material and palpable goods, whither they were directed by the ambitious dreams of doctors and traditionary Pharisees.*

If even the Apostles, then, had so much trouble in divesting themselves of their childish prejudices—they who lived amid the miracles of the Messiah and in constant intercourse with him—how could Joseph have done it of himself, without assistance from on high? The coarse garments of the workman had little resemblance to the purple of the kings of Juda; and of all things, it was least expected that the Messiah should spring from the people. Galilee was, besides, the last country that would have been thought of. "Search the Scriptures," said the doctors of the law to the disciples of Christ, "and see that out of Galilee a prophet riseth not." In fact, the prophets had specially mentioned Bethlehem of Juda—Bethlehem, *the house of bread*—as the birth-place of the Messiah; and the Jewish commentators, outstripping the prophets, pretended to point out the quarter of the city in which he was to be born.† Joseph was too humble to think that his lowly roof was to shelter so much greatness, and Mary's silence left him nothing to guess.

As for the project of sending back the Virgin to her own family, *through pure respect*, as some learned theologians of the Bernardine school will have it—it would have been utterly impracticable in a nation so jealous of all that concerned female honour. Mary was an orphan, and therefore under the care of her relations, all of whom were not of a pacific disposition, while it is probable that some of them were far from being pleased by the marriage of their young kinswoman with the obscure Nazarene. It is very improbable that they would have taken Joseph's word, and ad-

* Bossuet, *Elevations sur les Mystères*, t. ii., p. 135.

† Whence comes he (the Messiah)? From the royal city, Bethlehem of Juda. Where are his parents? In the quarter Biral Harba of Bethlehem of Juda. (See *Talmud de Jerusalem*.)

mitted, without further information, that the Virgin was pregnant of the *King-Messiah*. It is much more likely that they would have brought the husband before the tribunal of the ancients, there to give an account of his conduct; for the question was no longer of a simple divorce, but of the state of the child borne by Mary, a young woman of illustrious birth and unsuitably married, according to the eleven who, St. Jerome says, had been themselves on the list of candidates for the hand of the young and lovely heiress of Joachim.

Thence there would have resulted two grave facts. Either Joseph would have kept silent, and then he would have been obliged to take back his wife and forbidden ever to put her away;* or he would have solemnly sworn that the child which Mary bore was not his, in which case that child became incapacitated for any employment. His birth, defiled in its source, would have debarred him from the national assemblies, public schools, and entrance to the temple or the synagogues. His posterity, inheritors of disgrace, would not be admitted to the privileges of the Hebrews till the tenth generation. He became a fugitive, without rights, without country, and the warrant which condemned his mother to be stoned would have stamped his brow and that of his children with the accursed mark of Cain. But such could never have been the case. Rather than suffer such a stain to be imprinted on their royal genealogy, the proud descendants of David would have killed the Virgin with their own hands. Such examples are not rare, and are of frequent occurrence even now, in Judea as well as in Arabia.†

* *Instit. de Moïse*, t. ii., l. vii.

† Niebuhr relates that, "in a coffee-house of Yemen, an Arab having asked another who was present if he were not the father of a young and beautiful woman newly married in his tribe, the father suspecting an ironical meaning in the question, and thinking the honour of his family compromised, coolly arose, ran to his daughter's house, and, without saying a word, plunged his weapon into her bosom." Father Geramb gives an anecdote of the same kind. "The widow of a Bethlehemite Catholic," says he, "became an object of suspicion; not knowing where to conceal herself from the vengeance of her family, she took refuge in the convent of the Fathers of the Holy Land, and put herself under the sacred protection of the altar. Her asylum was discovered, the doors of the monastery forced, and the young woman

Joseph was too wise and too humane to place himself in either predicament, and he found, as is always the case, that the most generous part was the best. He resolved, then, to quit his native city and his dear, though suspected wife, who had made him so supremely happy ever since their chaste marriage. Whilst he was preparing for this sad separation, as he slept one night on his solitary couch, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," said the celestial envoy, "fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."

After this dream and the words of the angel, Joseph found himself completely changed. His humility was not in the least disturbed by the honour which God conferred upon him, in transferring to him the guidance of his only Son; but he had become a father and a spouse in affection, and he thought of nothing more but the care of Mary and her divine Infant.

St. John Chrysostom inquired why the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, and not manifestly, as to the shepherds, to Zachary, and the Virgin. "It is," says he, answering his own question, "because Joseph had great faith, and required no clearer revelation. As for the Virgin, since there were things to be told to her greater and more incredible than all that was told to Zachary, it was necessary that they should be revealed to her before they were put into execution, and that by a manifest revelation. The shepherds, also, as more rude and simple, had need of a clear vision. But Joseph having already seen the pregnancy of Mary, *having conceived injurious suspicions of her*, and being

dragged out, her hair all dishevelled, to the public place, amid the shouts of the populace, and the supplications of the monks, who demanded, in the name of the crucified God, pardon and mercy for that unhappy creature, who loudly asserted her innocence. She called, in despair, on her father and brothers, beseeching them, in the most touching manner, to save her from a cruel death. They advanced in gloomy silence, each grasping a poignard: the unfortunate woman shuddered; a moment after, the three poignards were plunged into her heart, and the murderers, washing their hands in the blood of their daughter and sister, exulted in having washed away the disgrace of their family."

ready to change his sorrow for joy, if he only had the opportunity, he received with all his heart the revelation made by the angel This conduct of Providence was infinitely wise, since it served to prove the excellence of Joseph's virtue, and to render the Gospel history more credible, showing him actuated by the same motives that would have influenced any man on such an occasion.*

* St. John Chrysostom, *Serm.* 4



CHAPTER XI.

THE BIRTH OF THE MESSIAH.

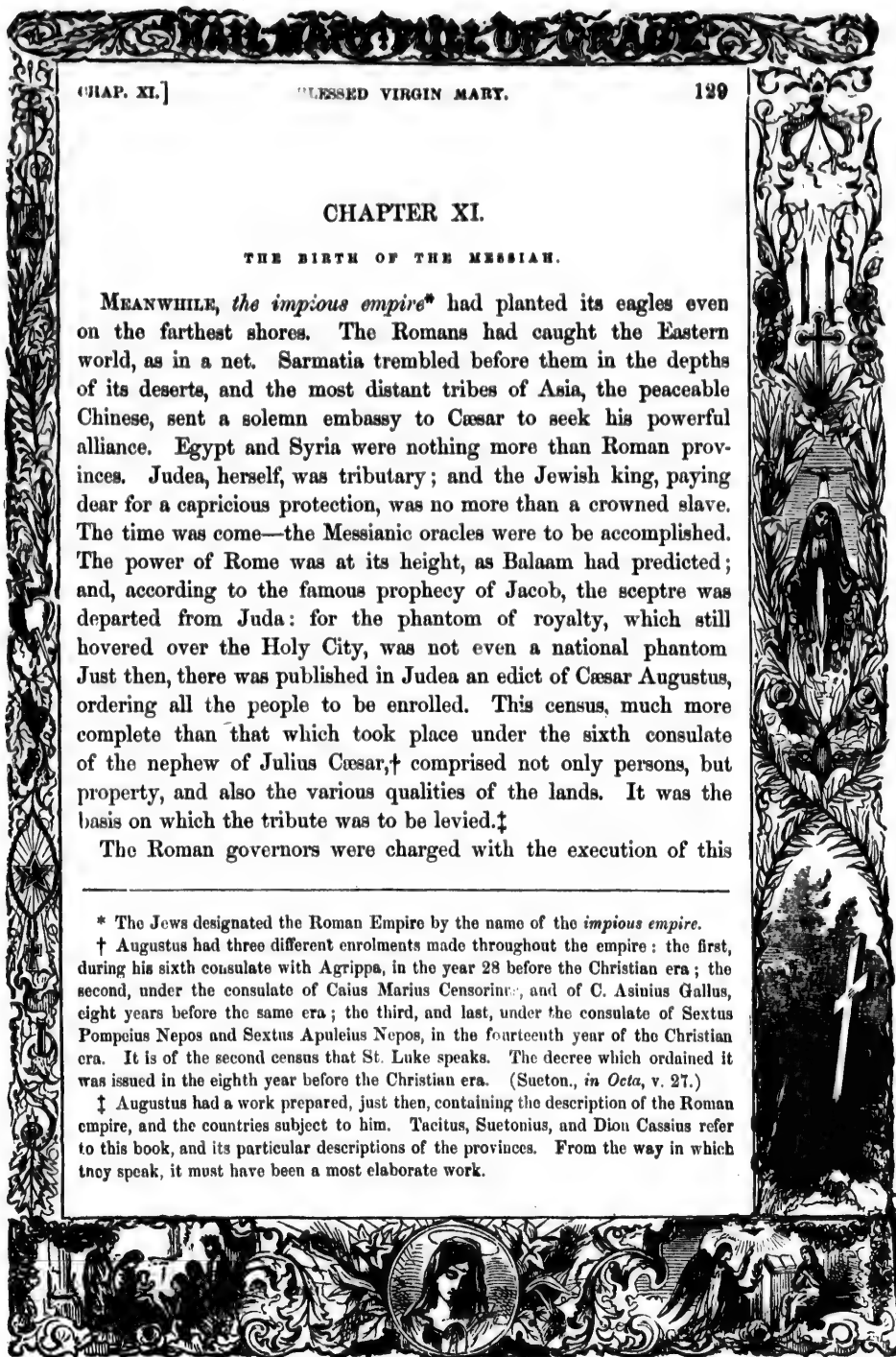
MEANWHILE, *the impious empire** had planted its eagles even on the farthest shores. The Romans had caught the Eastern world, as in a net. Sarmatia trembled before them in the depths of its deserts, and the most distant tribes of Asia, the peaceable Chinese, sent a solemn embassy to Cæsar to seek his powerful alliance. Egypt and Syria were nothing more than Roman provinces. Judea, herself, was tributary; and the Jewish king, paying dear for a capricious protection, was no more than a crowned slave. The time was come—the Messianic oracles were to be accomplished. The power of Rome was at its height, as Balaam had predicted; and, according to the famous prophecy of Jacob, the sceptre was departed from Juda: for the phantom of royalty, which still hovered over the Holy City, was not even a national phantom. Just then, there was published in Judea an edict of Cæsar Augustus, ordering all the people to be enrolled. This census, much more complete than that which took place under the sixth consulate of the nephew of Julius Cæsar,† comprised not only persons, but property, and also the various qualities of the lands. It was the basis on which the tribute was to be levied.‡

The Roman governors were charged with the execution of this

* The Jews designated the Roman Empire by the name of the *impious empire*.

† Augustus had three different enrolments made throughout the empire: the first, during his sixth consulate with Agrippa, in the year 28 before the Christian era; the second, under the consulate of Caius Marius Censorinus, and of C. Asinius Gallus, eight years before the same era; the third, and last, under the consulate of Sextus Pompeius Nepos and Sextus Apuleius Nepos, in the fourteenth year of the Christian era. It is of the second census that St. Luke speaks. The decree which ordained it was issued in the eighth year before the Christian era. (Sueton., in *Octa*, v. 27.)

‡ Augustus had a work prepared, just then, containing the description of the Roman empire, and the countries subject to him. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dion Cassius refer to this book, and its particular descriptions of the provinces. From the way in which they speak, it must have been a most elaborate work.



edict, each in his own department.* Sextius Saturninus, governor of Syria, began first with Phœnicia and Celo-Syria, rich and populous cantons, which required long and patient toil. In fact, there is nothing like it on record, except the famous registry taken by William the Conqueror a thousand years after, and so well known in England as the Domesday-book. Having executed the orders of Cæsar in the Roman provinces, with the kingdoms and principalities belonging to it, at the end of three years from the date of the decree,† they at length reached Bethlehem, precisely at the memorable period of our Saviour's birth. Cæsar and his agents thought they were performing only an administrative operation, by ascertaining the population and resources of the empire; but God had other designs, which they were made instrumental in executing, though they knew it not. His Son was to be born in Bethlehem of Juda, the humble birth-place of King David. He had foretold it, by his prophet, more than seven hundred years before, and all the world was put in motion to accomplish that prophecy.

It appears that, faithful to an ancient custom, the Jews still had themselves enrolled by families and by tribes. David was born at Bethlehem; his descendants, therefore, regarded that small city as their native place, and the cradle of their house. There it was, then, that they assembled to give in their names and the state of their property, conformably to the edict of Cæsar.

The autumn was near its close, the torrents were rushing wildly down into the valleys, the north wind whistled through the tall turpentine trees, and a gray cloudy sky announced the approach

* Tertullian states that such was the case with Sextius Saturninus, who was governor of Syria.

† The three years which were employed in making this census can make no difficulty, for it certainly took that length of time to enregister the whole of Syria, Celo-Syria, Phœnicia, and Judea. Joab took nearly ten months to number the fighting-men of the ten tribes; and the census of Augustus, at the time of the birth of Christ, consisted of many other details, since it embraced not only the individuals, but the various qualities of their lands. It took William the Conqueror six whole years to make his register, although the Domesday-book contained neither Ireland, Scotland, Wales, nor the Channel Islands, but merely England itself.

of the winter's snow. On a dark, gloomy morning, in the year of Rome 748,* a Nazarene was seen busily engaged in preparing for a journey, which could not be one of choice, for the time was unseasonable, and the woman who accompanied him, and whom he seated so carefully on the mild and patient animal which the daughters of the East prefer, was very young, and far advanced in her pregnancy. To the saddle of the beautiful animal† on which the young Galilean rode was attached a basket of palm-leaves, containing provisions for the journey; dates, figs, and dried grapes, some barley-cakes, and an earthen pitcher for taking water from the spring or the cistern. A leathern flask, of Egyptian manufacture, hung on the opposite side. The traveller flung over his shoulder a bag containing some clothes, girded his loins, wrapped himself up in his goat-skin cloak, and holding in one hand his crooked stick, with the other he seized the bridle of the ass which bore his young wife. Thus they quitted their humble abode, and descended the narrow streets of Nazareth, amid the good wishes of their friends and neighbours, who cried on every side, *Go in peace!* These travellers, who thus set out on that cloudy morning, were the humble descendants of the great kings of Juda, Joseph and Mary, who were going, on the order of a pagan and a stranger, to inscribe their obscure names beside the most illustrious names in the kingdom.

This journey, undertaken at such an inclement season, and in a country like Palestine, must have been extremely painful to the blessed Virgin, in the position in which she was; but, still, she did not murmur. That delicate and fragile creature had a soul both firm and courageous; a lofty soul, which greatness did not dazzle nor joy agitate, and which bore misfortune silently and calmly. Joseph, advancing by her side, was meditating on the ancient prophecies which promised, four thousand years before, a Liberator

* Never has date been more disputed than that of the birth of Christ. We adopt that of the authors of *l'Art de verifier les dates* (the Art of verifying dates), which seems to us the most correct, and which places the birth of the Saviour on the 25th of December, in the year of Rome 748. According to Baronius, our Saviour was born on a Friday.

† The asses in Palestine are remarkably beautiful.



to his people. As he journeyed towards Bethlehem, at the bidding of a Roman, he reflected on the words of the prophet Micheas, "And THOU, BETHLEHEM EPHRATA, art a little one among the thousands of Juda; out of thee shall HE come forth unto me, that is to be the Ruler in Israel."* Glancing, then, at his humble equipage and his modest spouse, in her plain, unpretending apparel, he revolved in his mind the great prophecies of Isaiah, "He shall grow up as a tender plant before him, and as a root out of a thirsty ground; there is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: . . . despised and the most abject of men."† And the patriarch began to comprehend the designs of God on his CHRIST.

After five days of a toilsome journey, the travellers caught a distant view of Bethlehem, the city of kings, seated on a rising ground, amid smiling hills planted with vines, olives, and groves of verdant oaks. Camels, laden with women wrapped up in purple cloaks, and covered with white veils; Arab *nakas*, dashing along at full speed, bearing gay and brilliant cavaliers; groups of old men, mounted on white asses, and chatting gravely together, like the ancient judges of Israel,‡ were all going up to the city of David, already crowded with Hebrews, who had arrived on the previous days. Outside the city, but a short distance from its walls, arose a large square building, whose white walls stood out in strong relief from the pale green of the olive-trees which covered the hill. It looked like one of the Persian caravansaries. Through its open door were seen a crowd of slaves and servants coming and going in its vast yard. This was the inn. Joseph, hurrying the pace of the animal on which the Virgin rode, hastened thither, in hopes of arriving in time to obtain one of those narrow cells, which belonged of right to the first comer, and was never refused to any one;§ but merchants and travellers were already issuing in

* Mich., ch. v., ver. 2.

† Isaiah, ch. lili., ver. 2.

‡ The horse was used, amongst the Jews, for military men; hence it was taken as the emblem of fight. Judges, on the contrary, rode on asses of perfect beauty; hence the scriptural words, "Speak, you that ride upon fair asses, and you that sit in judgment." (Judges, v. 10.)

§ There is nothing found in these cells but four walls, an abundance of dust, and





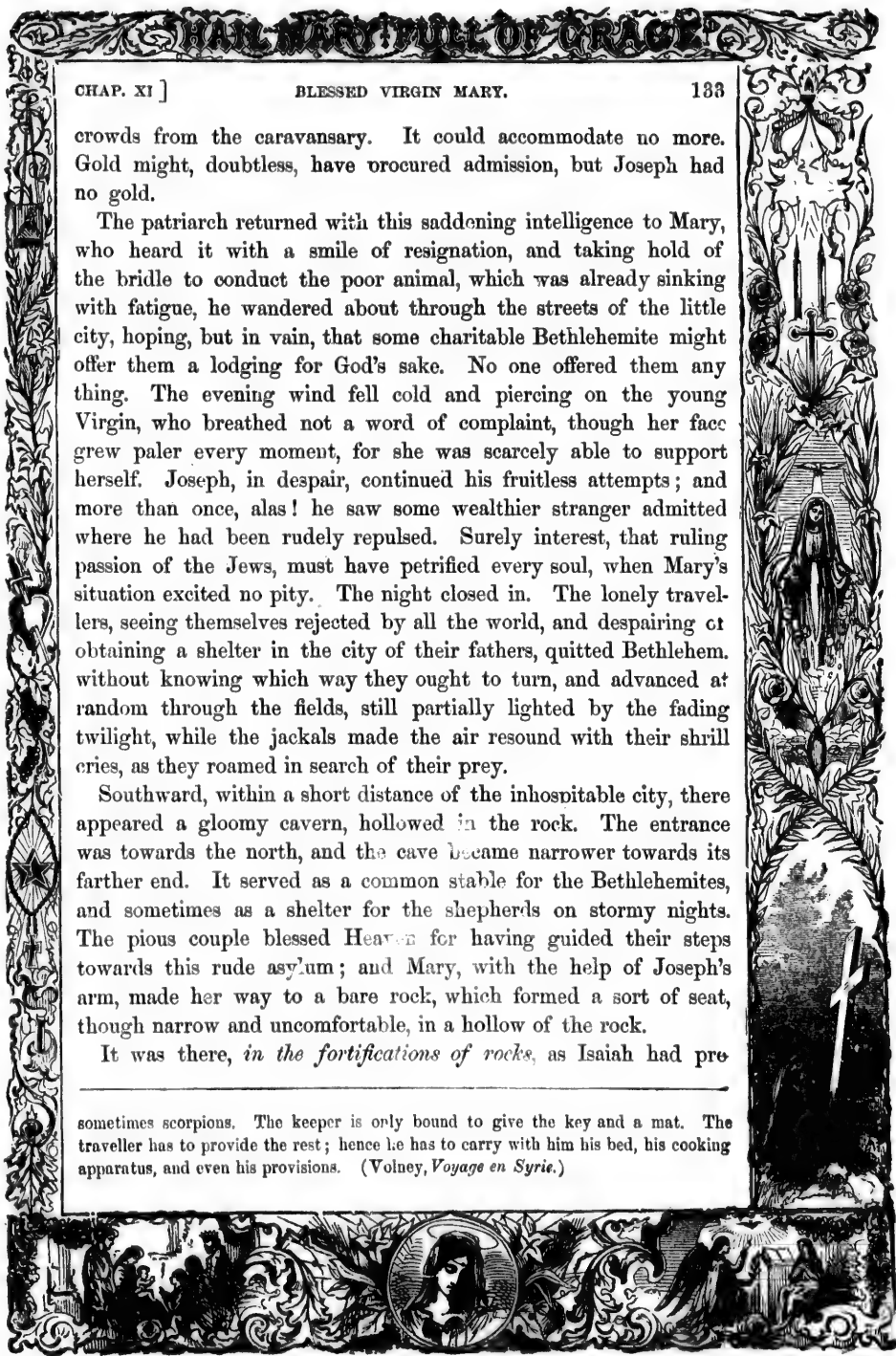
crowds from the caravansary. It could accommodate no more. Gold might, doubtless, have procured admission, but Joseph had no gold.

The patriarch returned with this saddening intelligence to Mary, who heard it with a smile of resignation, and taking hold of the bridle to conduct the poor animal, which was already sinking with fatigue, he wandered about through the streets of the little city, hoping, but in vain, that some charitable Bethlehemite might offer them a lodging for God's sake. No one offered them any thing. The evening wind fell cold and piercing on the young Virgin, who breathed not a word of complaint, though her face grew paler every moment, for she was scarcely able to support herself. Joseph, in despair, continued his fruitless attempts; and more than once, alas! he saw some wealthier stranger admitted where he had been rudely repulsed. Surely interest, that ruling passion of the Jews, must have petrified every soul, when Mary's situation excited no pity. The night closed in. The lonely travellers, seeing themselves rejected by all the world, and despairing of obtaining a shelter in the city of their fathers, quitted Bethlehem, without knowing which way they ought to turn, and advanced at random through the fields, still partially lighted by the fading twilight, while the jackals made the air resound with their shrill cries, as they roamed in search of their prey.

Southward, within a short distance of the inhospitable city, there appeared a gloomy cavern, hollowed in the rock. The entrance was towards the north, and the cave became narrower towards its farther end. It served as a common stable for the Bethlehemites, and sometimes as a shelter for the shepherds on stormy nights. The pious couple blessed Heaven for having guided their steps towards this rude asylum; and Mary, with the help of Joseph's arm, made her way to a bare rock, which formed a sort of seat, though narrow and uncomfortable, in a hollow of the rock.

It was there, *in the fortifications of rocks*, as Isaiah had pre-

sometimes scorpions. The keeper is only bound to give the key and a mat. The traveller has to provide the rest; hence he has to carry with him his bed, his cooking apparatus, and even his provisions. (*Volney, Voyage en Syrie.*)



dicted,* just as the rising of the mysterious constellation *Virgo* announced midnight,† that the *alma*‡ of the great Messianic prophecy, amidst the solemn stillness of nature, concealed by a luminous cloud,§ brought forth HIM whom God himself had produced *before the hills,*|| and who was *begotten from all eternity*. He suddenly appeared, like a sunbeam emerging from a cloud, before the eyes of his young, astonished mother, and came to take possession of the throne of his poverty, whilst the angels of God, prostrate around, adored him under his human form.¶ That virginal childbirth was exempt from cries, as from pains, and no groan disturbed the sacred silence of that night of wonders. Miraculously conceived, Jesus was born more miraculously still.

God was preparing for the world a new and grand sight, in the birth of a poor King. The palace which he destined for him was a deserted stable, a fitting asylum for him who, in the course of his life, was to say, "The fox has his den, the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of man has not where to lay his head." Moses, proscribed at his birth, had, at least, a cradle of bulrushes, when his sister, the young Mary, exposed him amid the reeds and the sacred lotus which at nightfall dip their leaves in the Nile;**

* Justin quotes the prophecy of Isaiah, (xxxiii. 16,) as applying to our Saviour's birth in a cave, "*The fortifications of rocks shall be his highness.*"

† "It is an incontestable fact," says Dupuis, "and independent of all the consequences which I will draw from it, that *precisely at the hour of midnight*, on the 25th December, in those ages when Christianity first appeared, the celestial sign which appeared on the horizon, and ushered in the opening of the new solar revolution, was the *Virgin* of the constellations.

‡ The word *alma*, employed by Isaiah, signifies, in Hebrew, a virgin in all her innocence. We have already said, in note fifty-five of the first chapter, that this word has given rise to many controversies between Jews and Christians.

§ *Proto-gospel*, St. James, ch. 17.

|| According to the sentiment of the Rabbins, the Messiah was in the terrestrial paradise with our first parents. (Sohar Chadaseh, f. 82, 4.) He existed even before the world. (Nezach Israel, ch. 35.) And before becoming man he was in glory with God. (Phil., ch. ii., v. 6.) Thus, immediately before the time of Christ, the idea of the Messiah's pre-existence found its way into the higher theology of the Jews.

¶ Hebrews, i. 6. Psalm xlvii. 7.

** The *lotus*, which was consecrated to the sun, is an aquatic plant, the leaves of which dip into the Nile when the sun sets, and spring up again when he rises. This



but Jesus, the divine outcast, who came amongst us to suffer and to die, had not even that magnificence. He was laid in a manger, on a handful of damp straw, providentially forgotten by some camel-driver from Egypt or Syria, hastening away before the dawn. God had provided a couch for his only Son, as he provides nests for the birds of the air.

But this new Adam was to be covered from the inclemency of the weather, and also because modesty required it. Mary tore her veil into bands, wherewith she wrapped up his delicate limbs; then the infant God was adored, by her and her holy spouse, as Joseph of old, the fairest type of Jesus Christ, was by his father and mother.

St. Basil, entering into the mysteries of fervour and of rapture which passed through the soul of the Virgin, shows her divided between maternal love and holy adoration. "What am I to call thee?" said she, addressing her infant God. . . . "A mortal? . . . not so, for I conceived thee by divine operation. . . . A God? but thou hast a human body. Am I to approach thee with incense, or to offer thee my milk? Am I to cherish thee as a tender mother, or to serve thee prostrate in the dust? A marvellous contrast: Heaven is thy dwelling-place, yet I rock thee on my knee! Thou art on earth, and yet retainest thy place in heaven! The heavens are with thee!"

Thus were accomplished the great prophecies of Isaiah and Michaels. "And there were in the same country shepherds watching, and keeping the night-watches over their flock. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the brightness of God shone round about them: and they feared with a great fear. And the angel said to them: Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and laid in a manger. And suddenly there was

plant has a narcotic quality. It was said of those who made long voyages, that they had eaten of the *lotus*; that is to say, that they had forgotten their country. (Bassano, l. ix., ch. 15, p. 450.)



with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST; AND ON EARTH PEACE TO MEN OF GOOD WILL.**

The marvellous vision had disappeared, the heavenly music had ceased, and the shepherds, leaning on their crooks, still listened for a renewal of those ravishing sounds. When they could hear nothing more save the night breeze murmuring through the valley, and that they could no longer discover in the deep blue sky a single radiant point which fancy could convert into an angel, the shepherds took counsel together, and said one to another, "*Let us go to Bethlehem, and see this word that is come to pass.*" Then, taking baskets, with such simple presents as their cabins could afford, they left their flocks to their own guidance for a while, and set out by the glimmering light of the stars for the little city of David. At sight of the poor stable, they felt their hearts burn within them, like the disciples of Emmaüs, and they said to each other, "*It chaps this is the place.*" For they knew that the divine child who was born to them had not seen the light under gilded ceilings, nor was laid in a royally-adorned cradle. The angel had made no such announcement. They advanced, then, with faith, hope, and love, towards that deserted stable, where they well deserved to find the promised Saviour, since they came to seek him with pure hearts and single minds.

Looking into the cave, in order to assure themselves that they had really reached the term of their nocturnal pilgrimage, *these men of good will* discovered Him who came to preach the Gospel

* The village of the shepherds is situated on a very pleasant plain, about a quarter of a league to the north of Bethlehem, and in the depth of the valley is the celebrated field, where these shepherds were grazing their flocks on Christmas night. According to grave authors, both sacred and profane, the appearance of the angels to the shepherds was not the only prodigy that signalized the birth of the infant God. They relate that, during that holy night, the vines of Engaddi blossomed; that, at Comus, the Temple of Peace suddenly fell, and the oracles of the demons were silenced for ever. The mere birth of our Lord, was a sentence of banishment for those heathen deities, who had hitherto been permitted to deliver oracles. Milton, with true poetic inspiration, thus describes, in one of his earlier compositions, the flight of these pretended divinities on Christmas Eve.



to the poor, and abolish *the curse of slavery*, under the humble form of a little babe peacefully slumbering in his crib.

The Virgin, bent over her new-born infant, was regarding him with touching humility and profound tenderness. Joseph stood close by, his venerable head bowed down before that adopted son, who was truly God. A ray of moonlight shone on the divine group, and on the reddish wall of rock; without, the earth was calmly reposing in the bright, silvery light.*

"This *is* the place," said the shepherds to themselves; and prostrating themselves, respectfully, before the manger of the King of kings, they offered to the infant God "the mite" and the homage of the poor.

There they related the apparition of the angels, their ravishing hymns, and their joyful words. Joseph admired this divine manifestation, and Mary, who heard the simple tale in silence, treasured up every word within her heart. This duty fulfilled, and their mission ended, the shepherds of Juda retired praising God, and published in the mountains the marvels of that holy night. They who heard them were seized with astonishment, and said to themselves, "Can it be possible? Are we, then, gone back to the days of Abraham, when angels visited shepherds?"

Perchance it was these tales, told at evening in the skirt of the woods or in the deep ravine, whilst the camels drank together at the lonely spring, that induced one of the Arab tribes to deify Mary and the child. The sweet image of the Virgin, with her Son on her knee, was painted on one of the pillars of the Caaba, and solemnly placed amongst the three hundred and sixty deities of the three Arabias. In the time of Mahomet they were still seen there,† as we find from grave Arab writers. After the massacre of the

* "The Persians call Christmas night *scheb jaldai*, the clear and luminous night, because of the descent of the angels." (D'Herbelot, *Bibl. Orient.*, t. ii., p. 294.)

† "El Azraki quotes the ocular testimony of many respectable persons," says Burckhart, "in proof of a remarkable fact which has not hitherto been noticed, as far as I am aware. It is, that the figure of the Virgin Mary, with the young Asia (*Jesus*) on her knee, was carved as a divinity on one of the nearest pillars of the Caaba." (Burckhart, *Voyage en Arabie*, t. i., p. 221.)

Holy Innocents, that valiant tribe rose in a body, gave a long, loud cry of revenge, and, heedless of the enemy's superior numbers, attacked Herod's son, protected as he was by the Romans.*

This authentic anecdote, so curious and so little known, serves to confirm the supernatural fact related by St. Luke—a fact which the scoffing philosophers of the Voltairian school, and the, if possible, still more pagan adepts of pantheism, have not failed to set down as a fable. The fantastic devotion of these Arabs, who commit idolatry with the true God before the preaching of the Gospel, can only be accounted for by the miracles of the holy night of Christmas.

On the eighth day after his birth the Son of God was circumcised, and named [†] *Jesus*, according to the command of his heavenly Father. He must have had a god-father, like all the Israelites, but there is no record of the name of that favoured man. As to the ceremony of the Circumcision, which was always performed under the patronage of Elias (who, according to the Hebrews, never failed to assist invisibly),[†] it took place, St. Epiphanius says, in the very cavern where Jesus was born; and St. Bernard presumes, with much probability, that St. Joseph was the minister on that occasion.

Some men of the lower classes, docile to the call of the angels, came to adore the infant God in his manger, and to share with him their black bread and goat's milk. A miracle of a higher order, and of greater renown, brought soon after, to the same crib, the first fruits of converted gentilism. The shepherds of Jude had led the way—it was for kings and sages to follow.

* This fact, which confirms the account of the Arab historian, is mentioned in the *Toldos*, a very ancient Jewish book, written with the most violent hatred of Christians. We there see that Herod the Great and his son had to maintain a war against one of the tribes of the desert, who adored the image of *Jesus*, and *Mary*, his mother. This tribe sought the alliance of several cities of Palestine, and especially that of *Hai*. But, since the Jews themselves place this event in the lifetime of Herod, it must have been because of the massacre of the Innocents, as the old king lived only one year after the birth of our Saviour.

† See Basnage, l. vii., ch. 10

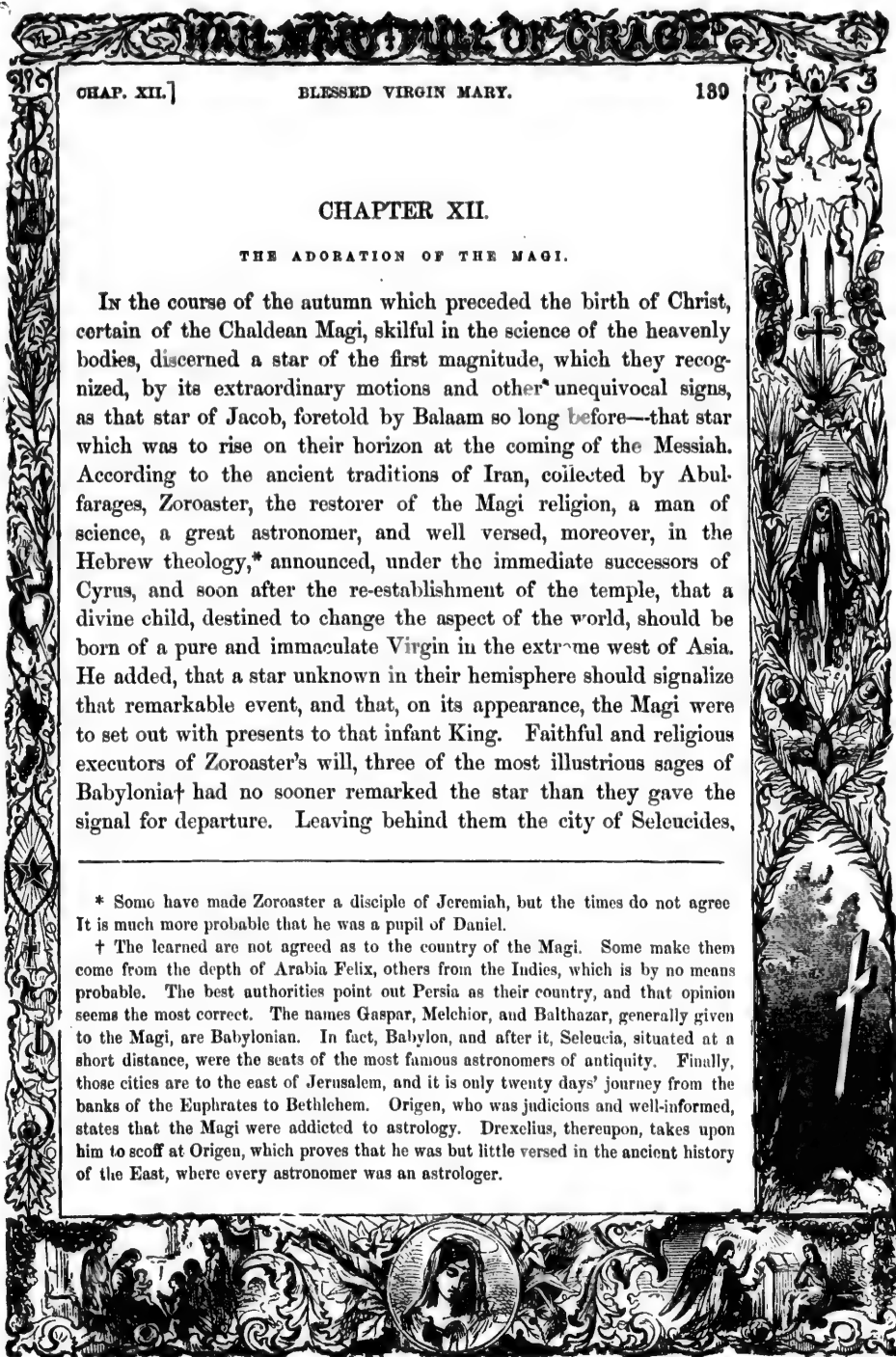
CHAPTER XII.

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI.

In the course of the autumn which preceded the birth of Christ, certain of the Chaldean Magi, skilful in the science of the heavenly bodies, discerned a star of the first magnitude, which they recognized, by its extraordinary motions and other* unequivocal signs, as that star of Jacob, foretold by Balaam so long before—that star which was to rise on their horizon at the coming of the Messiah. According to the ancient traditions of Iran, collected by Abulfarages, Zoroaster, the restorer of the Magi religion, a man of science, a great astronomer, and well versed, moreover, in the Hebrew theology,* announced, under the immediate successors of Cyrus, and soon after the re-establishment of the temple, that a divine child, destined to change the aspect of the world, should be born of a pure and immaculate Virgin in the extreme west of Asia. He added, that a star unknown in their hemisphere should signalize that remarkable event, and that, on its appearance, the Magi were to set out with presents to that infant King. Faithful and religious executors of Zoroaster's will, three of the most illustrious sages of Babylonia† had no sooner remarked the star than they gave the signal for departure. Leaving behind them the city of Seleucides,

* Some have made Zoroaster a disciple of Jeremiah, but the times do not agree. It is much more probable that he was a pupil of Daniel.

† The learned are not agreed as to the country of the Magi. Some make them come from the depth of Arabia Felix, others from the Indies, which is by no means probable. The best authorities point out Persia as their country, and that opinion seems the most correct. The names Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, generally given to the Magi, are Babylonian. In fact, Babylon, and after it, Seleucia, situated at a short distance, were the seats of the most famous astronomers of antiquity. Finally, those cities are to the east of Jerusalem, and it is only twenty days' journey from the banks of the Euphrates to Bethlehem. Origen, who was judicious and well-informed, states that the Magi were addicted to astrology. Drexelius, thereupon, takes upon him to scoff at Origen, which proves that he was but little versed in the ancient history of the East, where every astronomer was an astrologer.



with its stately palm-wood buildings,* and Babylon, where the mournful desert-wind seemed whispering to the silent ruins the fatal prophecy of the son of Amos, they quitted the land of dates and took the sandy road to Palestine. Before them, like the luminous pillar which guided the flying cohorts of Israel towards the desert strand of the Red Sea, moved the star of the Messiah. That new star, independent of the laws which govern the heavenly bodies, had no regular motion peculiar to itself. Now it advanced at the head of the caravan, moving in a straight line towards the west; now it remained stationary over the tents erected for the night, seeming to balance itself gently in the clouds like a sleeping albatross. At the dawn of day it gave the signal for departure, as it had done at night for halting.†

At length the lofty towers of Jerusalem were visible in the distance, amid the bare, bleak summits of its mountains. The camels were quenching their thirst at a wayside cistern, when the Magi gave a cry of surprise and alarm. The star had disappeared in the far depths of heaven, like a rational creature who perceives an impending danger.‡

Thus put out, like the mariners of ancient times when dark clouds concealed the polar star, the Magi consulted a moment. What meant the sudden disappearance of their brilliant guide? Were they then at the term of their long journey? It was very possible, and even probable that the infant King, whom they came from the banks of the Tigris to adore, might be found in Jerusalem. "The *God of heaven*," thought they, "does not idly prolong his miracles; they cease when human agents are sufficient. That is

* Strabo, b. xvii.

† St. John Chrys., *Serm. 6 in Matth.* Chalcidius, a pagan philosopher, who lived about the end of the third century, makes mention of this star, and the Eastern sages whom it guided to the birth-place of Christ. St. Augustine, the doctor of doctors, says on this subject, "A new star appeared at the birth of Him whose death was to obscure the ancient sun." What, then, was that star which never appeared before or since in the firmament? Was it not the magnificent language of Heaven, recounting the glory of God and a virgin's child-bearing?

‡ This cistern, or well, on the highway near Jerusalem, is still known as the *Cistern of the Three Kings*, or of the *Star*, in memory of this event.

the usual order of things. What matter though the star has left us? We may easily, without its assistance, find this new king in the capital of his states. To find out the young Messiah, we have only to enter the first street which we shall find strewed with green branches, perfumed with essence of roses, and tapestried with cloth of gold. The sound of the Hebrew harps, their dancing choruses, and shouts of joy, will speedily show us which way we are to go." Then, quickening their pace, they passed the boundary gate, and penetrated into the ancient city through two files of barbarian soldiers.

The aspect of Jerusalem was strange. Its populace, busy, yet silent, had no appearance of either joy or festival. Groups gathered together, here and there, to stare at the strangers, whom they recognized by their long white robes, girt with magnificent eastern zones, by their *bazubends*,* enriched with precious stones, and, especially, by the manly beauty of their features, as satraps of the great king. The Eastern cavaliers, as they passed along, bent over the neck of their dromedaries to ask some of the numerous spectators where they were to find the new-born King of the Jews, whose star they had seen in the East. The people of Jerusalem, regarding each other in surprise, knew not what to answer. . . . A king of the Jews! . . . What king? They knew none but Herod, whom they abhorred, and he had no infant son. Astonished, in their turn, that all whom they interrogated declared their ignorance, and, moreover, seeing no mark of festivity anywhere around, the Magi, in great consternation, ascended the populous street which led to the ancient palace of David, and erected their tents amid its ruinous, but shady courts.

Meanwhile, the appearance of these Persian nobles, who seldom visited the mountains of Judea, their startling questions, which both amazed and intimidated a people who were kept in constant trepidation by the system of espionage organized by Herod,† soon

* *Bazubends*, ancient bracelets adorned with diamonds, turquoises, and pearls, which the satraps wore above the elbow. The king of Persia and his sons still wear the *bazubend*. (See Morier, *Voyage en Perse et en Arménie*.)

† See Josephus, *Ant. Jud.*, c. xv., ch. 13.



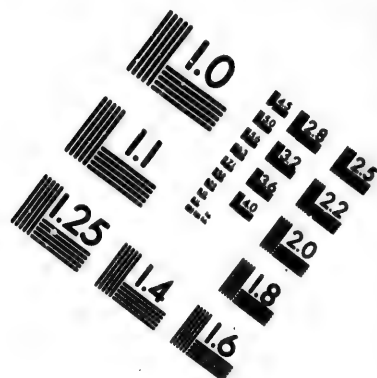
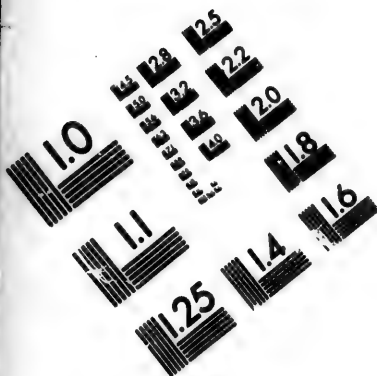
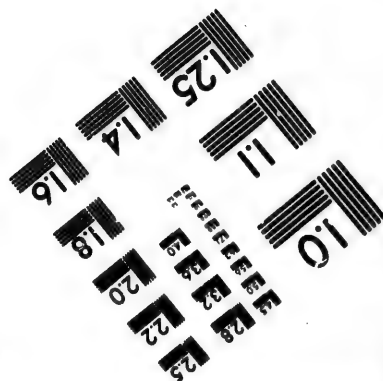
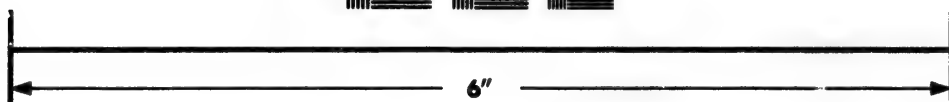
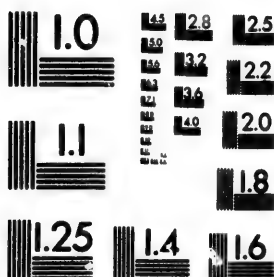


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excited a general tumult in that seditious city, the most restless in all the East. The name of the Messiah-king, pronounced by the Pharisees—ever careful to excite the fears of the aged monarch, as to the prospects of his house and the duration of his own power—fell amid the listening groups like a spark amongst stubble. The King-Messiah! There was freedom in that sound. There was conquest—there was glory! It spoke of the banner of Juda, waving in triumph over a conquered world. The satraps of Persia were considered the first astrologers in the world.* They had, doubtless, read the birth of the Hebrew *Goël*† in the stars. The heir of the kings of Juda was about to ascend the great throne of his fathers, and to banish the race of the Herods, *those half Jews*, who were the slaves of Rome! A sullen murmur, like that which precedes the ocean-storm, quickly spread from street to street, from house to house. Never had the people of Jerusalem felt less disposed to obey the royal edict which forbade them *to meddle with any thing but their own affairs*.‡ Vainly did the fierce soldiers of Herod fringe the ramparts and platforms of the towers. The people were roused: they were no longer afraid to conspire together in the open street. *All Jerusalem was troubled*, says the Gospel, and it was soon the tyrant's turn to be troubled himself.

Herod then dwelt in his palace in Jerusalem; but its flowery gardens, peopled as they were with rare birds, and intersected by limpid streams,§ could not divert his mind from the gloomy recollections and dark forebodings which rendered life a burden to him. Apprised by his chief spy of the arrival of the Magi, and their strange discourse, his massive brow, wrinkled with harassing thought, grew dark as a stormy sky, and his anxiety was visible to all.

* All the East then believed in Astrology, and Philo tells us that the satraps of Persia passed for the first astrologers in the world.

† *Goel* (Saviour), one of the names by which the Hebrews designated the Messiah.

‡ Herod had strictly forbidden the Jews to speak of state affairs. They could not even assemble to hold those great family-festivals hitherto so common amongst them. His spies, spread over the whole city, and even along the highways, instantly arrested those who infringed on the royal edict. They were thrown secretly, and sometimes even openly, into the fortresses, where they were severely punished. (Joseph., *Ant. Jud.*, c. xv., ch. 13.)

§ Josephus, *de Bello*, b. v., ch. 13.

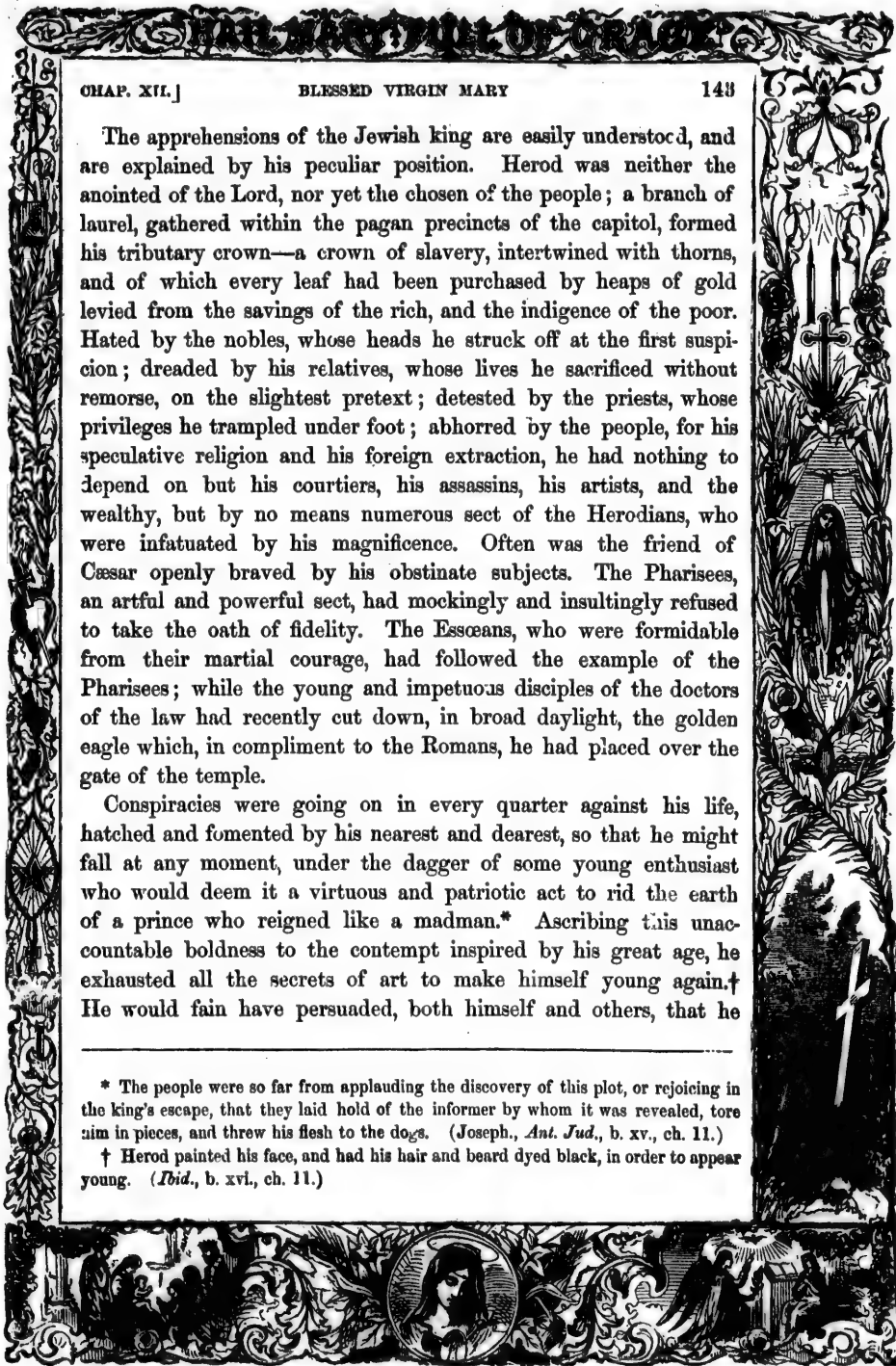


The apprehensions of the Jewish king are easily understood, and are explained by his peculiar position. Herod was neither the anointed of the Lord, nor yet the chosen of the people; a branch of laurel, gathered within the pagan precincts of the capitol, formed his tributary crown—a crown of slavery, intertwined with thorns, and of which every leaf had been purchased by heaps of gold levied from the savings of the rich, and the indigence of the poor. Hated by the nobles, whose heads he struck off at the first suspicion; dreaded by his relatives, whose lives he sacrificed without remorse, on the slightest pretext; detested by the priests, whose privileges he trampled under foot; abhorred by the people, for his speculative religion and his foreign extraction, he had nothing to depend on but his courtiers, his assassins, his artists, and the wealthy, but by no means numerous sect of the Herodians, who were infatuated by his magnificence. Often was the friend of Cæsar openly braved by his obstinate subjects. The Pharisees, an artful and powerful sect, had mockingly and insultingly refused to take the oath of fidelity. The Essæans, who were formidable from their martial courage, had followed the example of the Pharisees; while the young and impetuous disciples of the doctors of the law had recently cut down, in broad daylight, the golden eagle which, in compliment to the Romans, he had placed over the gate of the temple.

Conspiracies were going on in every quarter against his life, hatched and fomented by his nearest and dearest, so that he might fall at any moment, under the dagger of some young enthusiast who would deem it a virtuous and patriotic act to rid the earth of a prince who reigned like a madman.* Ascribing this unaccountable boldness to the contempt inspired by his great age, he exhausted all the secrets of art to make himself young again.† He would fain have persuaded, both himself and others, that he

* The people were so far from applauding the discovery of this plot, or rejoicing in the king's escape, that they laid hold of the informer by whom it was revealed, tore him in pieces, and threw his flesh to the dogs. (*Joseph., Ant. Jud., b. xv., ch. 11.*)

† Herod painted his face, and had his hair and beard dyed black, in order to appear young. (*Ibid., b. xvi., ch. 11.*)



was still that young and brilliant Herod who surpassed most of the Hebrews in all gymnastic exercises; Herod, the bold cavalier, the skilful huntsman, the proud and handsome prince, who had despised the love of that famous Egyptian queen for whom Antony had lost the empire of the world. But, alas! the silvery hairs which began to appear amid the dark locks of his sons, their impatience to reign, the spirit of revolt and sedition gliding in amongst the people, and the insolence of the brigands, who were again beginning their depredations in Galilee, all gave him but too clearly to understand that his reign—his dread reign—was drawing to a close. Harassed with suspicion, and distrusting even his spies, he sometimes wandered at night through the streets and squares of his metropolis,* and heard with his own ears the deep imprecations, the bitter reproaches, the biting sarcasms heaped on the *upstart, the Ascalonite, the wild beast*, who had killed his innocent wife—that gem of beauty and pattern of chastity—and who had afterwards caused the two sons whom he had by her to be put to death—those two princes, so sad, so beautiful, so stately, and so dear to the people because of the Asmonean heroes, their ancestors, and their fair, but hapless mother. The day following these nocturnal rounds was sure to be one of mourning and death. None were spared. From the highest to the lowest, every offender was cut off. Hence, on every side, there were heard vows of vengeance; and as often as the delusive report of Herod's death was spread, whether by accident or design, through the distant provinces, the people, greedily snatching at the deceitful bait, so gratifying to their hatred, hastened everywhere to kindle bonfires, which Herod quenched in blood.

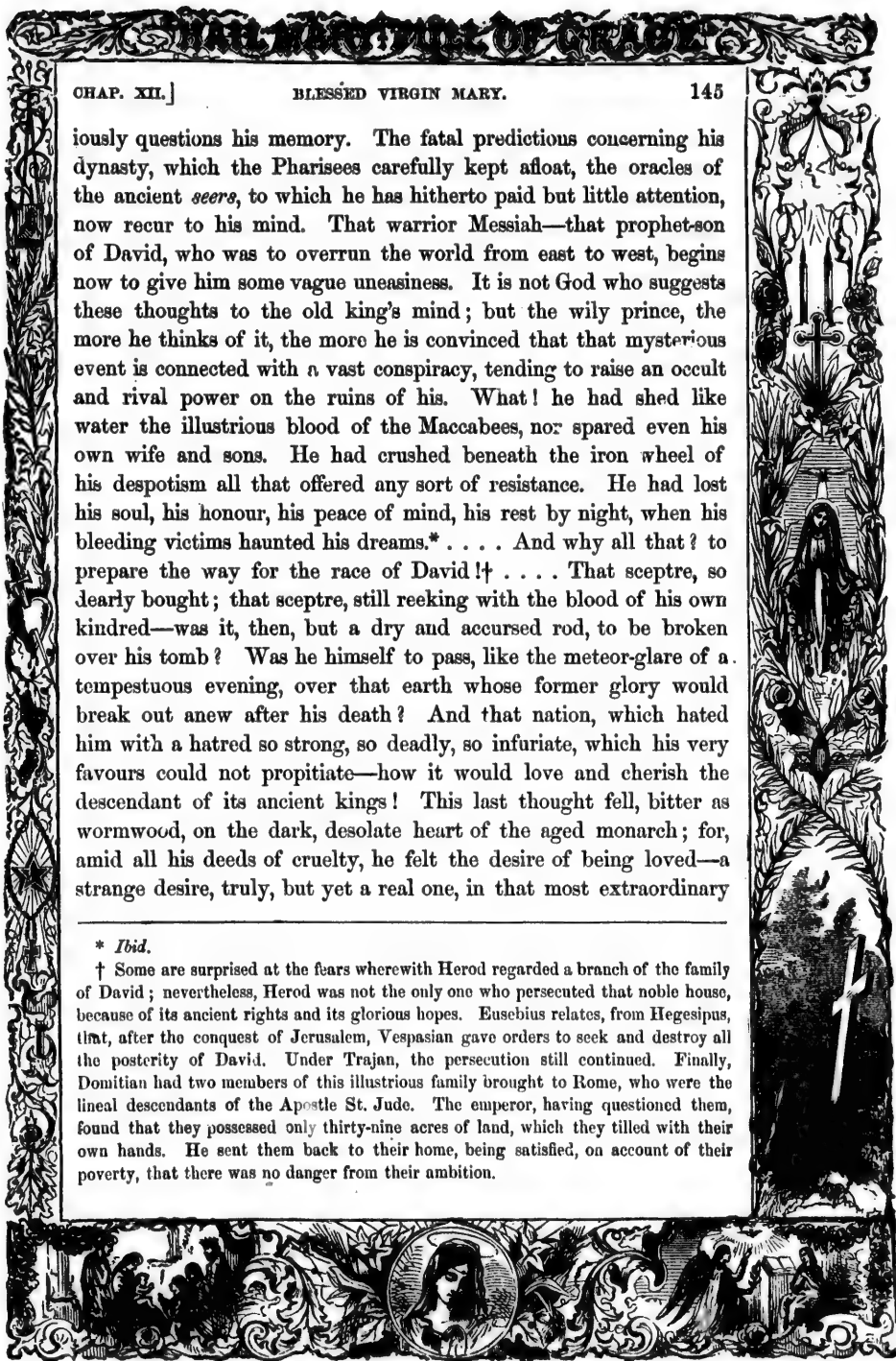
In the midst of these elements of civil discord, when the army was in a state of all but open revolt, and the whole nation seemed merely awaiting the signal for a general insurrection, there arrives in Jerusalem certain foreigners of lofty mien, who inquire, without either mystery or concealment, for a new-born king of the Jews, whose star they have perceived. Herod is astounded. He anx-

* He often went out at night amongst the people, under some disguise, in order to find out the opinion entertained of him, and woe betide those whom he heard censure himself or his doings. (Joseph., b. xv., ch. 13.)

iously questions his memory. The fatal predictions concerning his dynasty, which the Pharisees carefully kept afloat, the oracles of the ancient *seers*, to which he has hitherto paid but little attention, now recur to his mind. That warrior Messiah—that prophet-son of David, who was to overrun the world from east to west, begins now to give him some vague uneasiness. It is not God who suggests these thoughts to the old king's mind; but the wily prince, the more he thinks of it, the more he is convinced that that mysterious event is connected with a vast conspiracy, tending to raise an occult and rival power on the ruins of his. What! he had shed like water the illustrious blood of the Maccabees, nor spared even his own wife and sons. He had crushed beneath the iron wheel of his despotism all that offered any sort of resistance. He had lost his soul, his honour, his peace of mind, his rest by night, when his bleeding victims haunted his dreams.* . . . And why all that? to prepare the way for the race of David!† . . . That sceptre, so dearly bought; that sceptre, still reeking with the blood of his own kindred—was it, then, but a dry and accursed rod, to be broken over his tomb? Was he himself to pass, like the meteor-glare of a tempestuous evening, over that earth whose former glory would break out anew after his death? And that nation, which hated him with a hatred so strong, so deadly, so infuriate, which his very favours could not propitiate—how it would love and cherish the descendant of its ancient kings! This last thought fell, bitter as wormwood, on the dark, desolate heart of the aged monarch; for, amid all his deeds of cruelty, he felt the desire of being loved—a strange desire, truly, but yet a real one, in that most extraordinary

* *Ibid.*

† Some are surprised at the fears wherewith Herod regarded a branch of the family of David; nevertheless, Herod was not the only one who persecuted that noble house, because of its ancient rights and its glorious hopes. Eusebius relates, from Hegesipus, that, after the conquest of Jerusalem, Vespasian gave orders to seek and destroy all the posterity of David. Under Trajan, the persecution still continued. Finally, Domitian had two members of this illustrious family brought to Rome, who were the lineal descendants of the Apostle St. Jude. The emperor, having questioned them, found that they possessed only thirty-nine acres of land, which they tilled with their own hands. He sent them back to their home, being satisfied, on account of their poverty, that there was no danger from their ambition.



nature, which seemed made up of contrasts, and which had devoted some of the very noblest qualities to the service of the most absorbing and the most cruel passion which can ravage the human soul—ambition.

"Let this child be earthly prince or heaven-sent prophet," said Herod, after a pause, "he must die . . . yea, and he *shall* die, were I sure of extinguishing, with that feeble breath, all the glories which our *seers* behold in the future. Athalia, that strong woman, who knew so well how to reign, forgot only one infant in the massacre of the royal family of Juda. . . . That child lived to deprive her of her throne and life. . . . For me, I shall try to forget nothing. But where are they hiding this *new-born* king of the Jews, whose birth the stars proclaim, and whom these insolent satraps come to seek at the very gates of my palace? . . . Can it, indeed, be that *Schilo* foretold by Jacob? . . . These are, perchance, only the idle dreams of astrologers. . . . No matter . . . we must make all sure." A few hours after, the doctors of the law and the chief priests were assembled in council, with Herod presiding, and were asked that question which seemed strange to them in the mouth of such a prince, "In what place is the Messiah to be born?"

The answer was prompt and unanimous. *In Bethlehem of Juda.* And the ancients of Israel, quite willing to annoy the friend of the Romans, failed not to add that, as the last week of Daniel was nearly at an end, the coming of the Messiah must be at hand. This information, by no means satisfactory, would not do for Herod, who must ascertain where the blow was to be struck. He resolved to interrogate the Magi, and to find out, if possible, the precise period of the child's birth, computing by the appearance of the star. Too cunning to grant the Persian sages a public audience, which would have given notoriety to a rumour which it was most important to stifle, the king had them brought before him, and examined them closely as to the time of the star's appearance. "He inquires minutely, not after the child, but the star," says St. John Chrysostom, "in order to observe all possible circumspection in laying his snare." Having learned all that he wished to know, the man of blood dismissed the strangers in an affable and gracious manner. "Go," said he, "and diligently *inquire after the young*

child: and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him."

Now, the Magi, like all lofty-minded men—sons of science and contemplation—were simple, sincere, and but little disposed to suspect evil. They understood despotism and cruelty in a prince, but they did not understand falsehood, for the first thing that the kings of Persia learn in their infancy is to speak the truth. They, therefore, gave implicit credence to the false words of the Idumean, and re-passing under the stately porticoes of that palace, which vied in magnificence with that of the great king, but which had not, with all its bronzes and arcades, the golden bell of the *suppliants*,* they quitted the Betzetha,† had their tents taken up, and once more traversed the Holy City to repair to the supposed birth-place of the Messiah. As they wound along the walls, enriched by trophies from the new amphitheatre, whose unusual style of decoration was an inexhaustible subject of ridicule for the Pharisees, they met King Herod, surrounded by a forest of Thracian and German spears, going in the direction of Jericho.‡

The Persians quitted Jerusalem by the Damascus gate; then, turning to the left, they made their way through some hollow ravines, intersected with steep hillocks which they had to climb. They were nearly an hour's journey from the capital of Judea,

* The kings of Persia administered justice in quite a patriarchal manner. They had above their heads a golden bell, and to the bell was fastened a chain, the end of which hung without the palace. Every time that the bell rang, the officers of the prince went forth from his apartments, and introduced before the *great king* the suppliants, who demanded justice of the prince himself, who instantly examined their case, and gave his decision with equity. (*Antar. Translated from the Arabic by Terrick Hamilton.*)

† The quarter named *Betzetha*, or the new city, which Herod had joined to Jerusalem, was situated to the north of the Temple; it contained the lower pond, the pond of probation, and Herod's palace.

‡ We have followed the authors who state that Herod set out for Jericho, where he was some time sick, just when the Magi went to Bethlehem; this is quite conformable to the Gospel narrative, for if Herod had been in Jerusalem when the Persians returned thither, they would probably have seen him prior to the angel's warning, which was not given until the night. The illness of Herod, by diverting his attention from the Magi and the child, left the former at liberty to return in peace to their own country, and gave the Holy Family time to set out for Nazareth.

and had permitted their camels to stop at a cistern to drink, when a brilliant point appeared in the heavens, and rapidly descended towards them like a falling star. "The star! our star!" cried the slaves, in a transport of joy. "The star!" repeated their masters, equally delighted; for they were now sure of being in the right way, and resumed their march with increased ardour.

They were preparing to enter the city of David, when the star, inclining towards the south, suddenly stopped over a deserted cave, which had the appearance of a rustic stable, and down, down it went till it seemed to rest, almost, on the head of the infant God. The sight of that motionless star, its soft rays falling brightly on that dreary grotto, filled the Magi with a lively faith, and a lively faith it did require to discover the King-Messiah in a poor, unnoticed child, born in such a place, laid in a manger, and whose mother, though fair and full of grace, was evidently of very obscure condition.

God, who would make the Jews ashamed of their obduracy by contrasting it with the pious haste and the docile faith of infidels, allotted it so that the strange humiliation of the holy family should not shake the firm belief of the Magi.

The worshippers of the sun—the Gentiles—who were to be saved by the Cross as well as the children of the covenant, penetrated into the lowly abode of CHRIST with as much veneration as though it were one of their own temples, built over subterraneous fires, wherein starry spheres kept ever turning.* Following the custom of their people, they prostrated themselves as they crossed the threshold, and having taken off their rich sandals, they adored the new-born infant as all the Eastern nations then adored their gods and their masters. Then, opening their caskets of perfumed wood, wherein were the offerings intended for the Messiah, they took out some of the finest gold, gathered in the neighbourhood of Niniveh the Great, and perfumes, purchased with fruits and pearls from the Arabs of Yemen. These mysterious gifts were not

* These spheres, composed of golden circles, hollowed like our armillary spheres, turned with a loud noise at sunrise. They are still to be seen at Oulam, where the Ghebers have a temple. (*Rabbi Benjamin.*)



carual, like the offerings of the Jews. The cradle of Him, who was come to abolish the sacrifices of the synagogue, was not to be sprinkled with blood; hence, the Magi did not sacrifice to him either spotless lambs or white heifers. They offered him gold, as an earthly prince—myrrh and incense, as a God.* Then, bowing down to the ground before Mary, whom they found *fair as the moon and modest as the pale water-lily*, they invoked the blessing of God upon her, and prayed that *the hand of misfortune might never reach her*.

This was the last scene of splendour in which the Virgin figured. The first period of her life, like a sweet dream of Ginnestan, had rolled away under roofs of cedar and of gold, amid sacred perfumes and the sound of harp and lyre; the second, full of mysteries and wonders, had brought her in connection with the inhabitants of heaven and the princes of Asia; the third was about to open under other auspices: it was now her turn for persecution, anguish and unutterable sorrow.

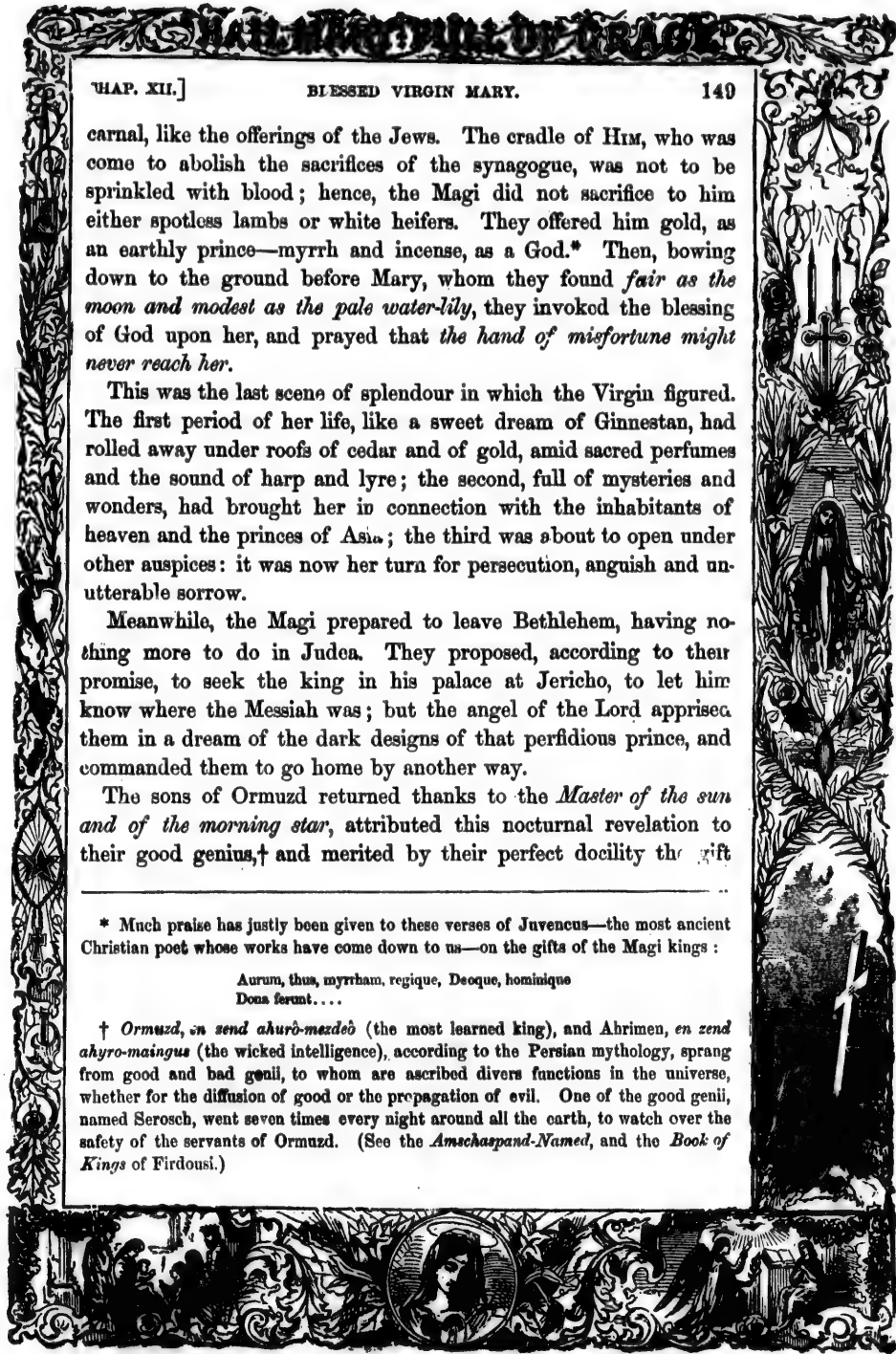
Meanwhile, the Magi prepared to leave Bethlehem, having nothing more to do in Judea. They proposed, according to their promise, to seek the king in his palace at Jericho, to let him know where the Messiah was; but the angel of the Lord apprised them in a dream of the dark designs of that perfidious prince, and commanded them to go home by another way.

The sons of Ormuzd returned thanks to the *Master of the sun and of the morning star*, attributed this nocturnal revelation to their good genius,† and merited by their perfect docility the gift

* Much praise has justly been given to these verses of Juvenius—the most ancient Christian poet whose works have come down to us—on the gifts of the Magi kings :

Aurum, thus, myrrham, regique, Deoque, hominique
Dona ferunt

† Ormuzd, *en zend ahurô-mazdêd* (the most learned king), and Ahrimen, *en zend ahyro-maingus* (the wicked intelligence), according to the Persian mythology, sprang from good and bad genii, to whom are ascribed divers functions in the universe, whether for the diffusion of good or the propagation of evil. One of the good genii, named Serosch, went seven times every night around all the earth, to watch over the safety of the servants of Ormuzd. (See the *Amechaspand-Named*, and the *Book of Kings* of Firdousi.)



of faith, which they afterwards received.* Instead of journeying by the barren and dangerous shores of that accursed lake, whose dark, stagnant waters cover the reprobate cities of the plain, they turned their camels' heads towards the coast of the Great Sea, where they could almost fancy themselves in the valleys of dates and roses† watered by the Euphrates and the Bend-Emyr, as they wound their way across the lovely strand of Syria.

* Very ancient authors affirm that the Magi received baptism from St. Thomas, it is believed that they suffered martyrdom in India, where they preached the Gospel.

† "The date trees of Babylon," says Diodorus of Sicily, "bear exquisite fruit; they are six inches long, some yellow, others red, and others of a purple colour, so that they are just as pleasing to the sight as to the taste. The trunk of the tree is of a surprising height, and is perfectly straight and even, but the head, or tuft, is not the same in all. Some date trees extend their branches in a round form, and the fruit of some grows out in clusters from the bark, about the middle; others have all their branches on one side, and their own weight bending them down towards the ground, gives them the form of a hanging lamp; others, again, divide their branches into two parts, and they then fall to the right and left in perfect symmetry." (*Diod. b. ii.*) Here is a description of the banks of the Euphrates, by an Arabian poet, anterior to Mahomet:—"They saw populous towns, plains abounding in flowing streams, date trees, and warbling birds and sweet-smelling flowers; and the country appeared like a blessing to enliven the sorrowing heart; and the camels were grazing and straying about the land; and they were of various colours, like the flowers of a garden." (*Antar, translated from the Arabic by Terriek Hamilton.*) As to the fields and gardens of roses so common in ancient Persia, see Firdousi's *Book of Kings*.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE PURIFICATION.

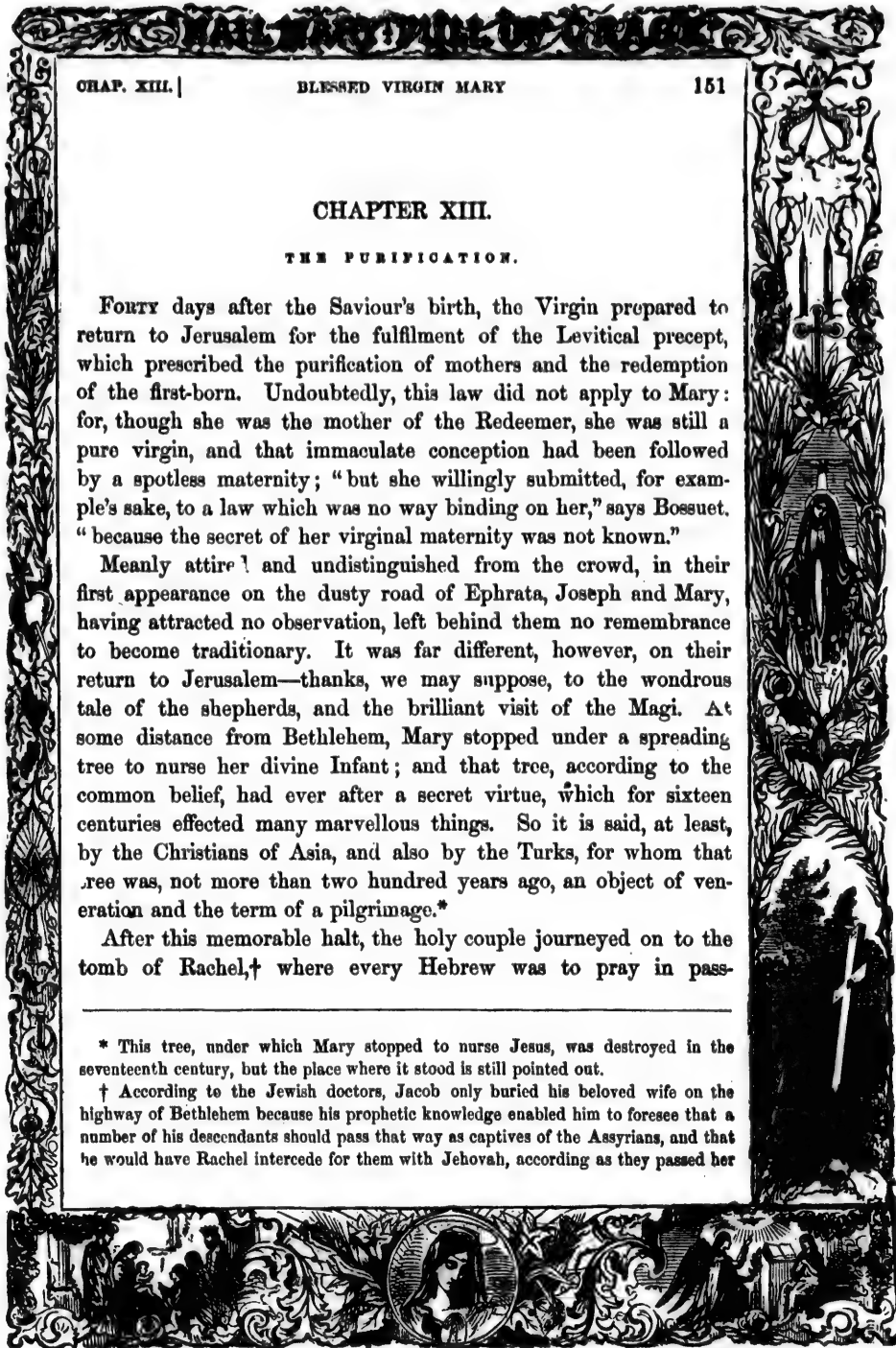
Forty days after the Saviour's birth, the Virgin prepared to return to Jerusalem for the fulfilment of the Levitical precept, which prescribed the purification of mothers and the redemption of the first-born. Undoubtedly, this law did not apply to Mary: for, though she was the mother of the Redeemer, she was still a pure virgin, and that immaculate conception had been followed by a spotless maternity; "but she willingly submitted, for example's sake, to a law which was no way binding on her," says Bossuet. "because the secret of her virginal maternity was not known."

Meanly attired and undistinguished from the crowd, in their first appearance on the dusty road of Ephrata, Joseph and Mary, having attracted no observation, left behind them no remembrance to become traditionary. It was far different, however, on their return to Jerusalem—thanks, we may suppose, to the wondrous tale of the shepherds, and the brilliant visit of the Magi. At some distance from Bethlehem, Mary stopped under a spreading tree to nurse her divine Infant; and that tree, according to the common belief, had ever after a secret virtue, which for sixteen centuries effected many marvellous things. So it is said, at least, by the Christians of Asia, and also by the Turks, for whom that tree was, not more than two hundred years ago, an object of veneration and the term of a pilgrimage.*

After this memorable halt, the holy couple journeyed on to the tomb of Rachel,† where every Hebrew was to pray in pass-

* This tree, under which Mary stopped to nurse Jesus, was destroyed in the seventeenth century, but the place where it stood is still pointed out.

† According to the Jewish doctors, Jacob only buried his beloved wife on the highway of Bethlehem because his prophetic knowledge enabled him to foresee that a number of his descendants should pass that way as captives of the Assyrians, and that he would have Rachel intercede for them with Jehovah, according as they passed her



ing. This primitive monument, consisted of twelve large stones overgrown with moss, on each of which was engraved the name of a tribe, and its only epitaph was a white Syrian rose—frail, sweet emblem of that lovely woman, who withered away ere yet her beauty had reached its prime, like the flower mentioned by Job. While they stopped to say a prayer for the dead over the revered dust of one of the saints of their people, the Virgin and Joseph little thought that the wailing of the dove, ascribed by Scripture to that fair Assyrian, was so soon to have its application, or that the mother of Joseph and of Benjamin was the desolate type of the mothers who, some days after, in the mountains of Judea, were to mourn for their children massacred in place of Jesus Christ.

Going forth from the vale of Rephaïm, whose ancient oaks shaded the graves of the gigantic race of Enac, the Virgin observed a tree whose sinister aspect saddened and depressed her heart. It was a barren olive-tree, whose pale leaves rustled in the evening breeze, with a mournful sound that seemed like the wail of human sorrow. As she passed under its gloomy foliage, uncheered by the song of any bird, Mary felt that sensation of blighting cold which belongs to the fatal shade of the manchineel-tree. That tree, if local tradition be not mistaken, was the *infamous* wood to which Christ was nailed.*

At the moment when Joseph and Mary made their way into the sacred inclosure, with the shekels of silver for the ransom and

tomb. Protestants have loudly exclaimed against this passage of the Talmud, as being too favourable to the intercession of the Virgin and the saints. This tomb of Rachel was so highly venerated, that every Jew who passed by made it a sacred duty to engrave his name on one of the stones; these enormous stones were twelve in number. (*Talm. of Jer.*) It is well known that the tears of Rachel, mentioned by Jeremiah, were but the figure of the tears shed by the Jewish women after the massacre of the Innocents. (S. Mat. ch. ii, v. 17, 18.)

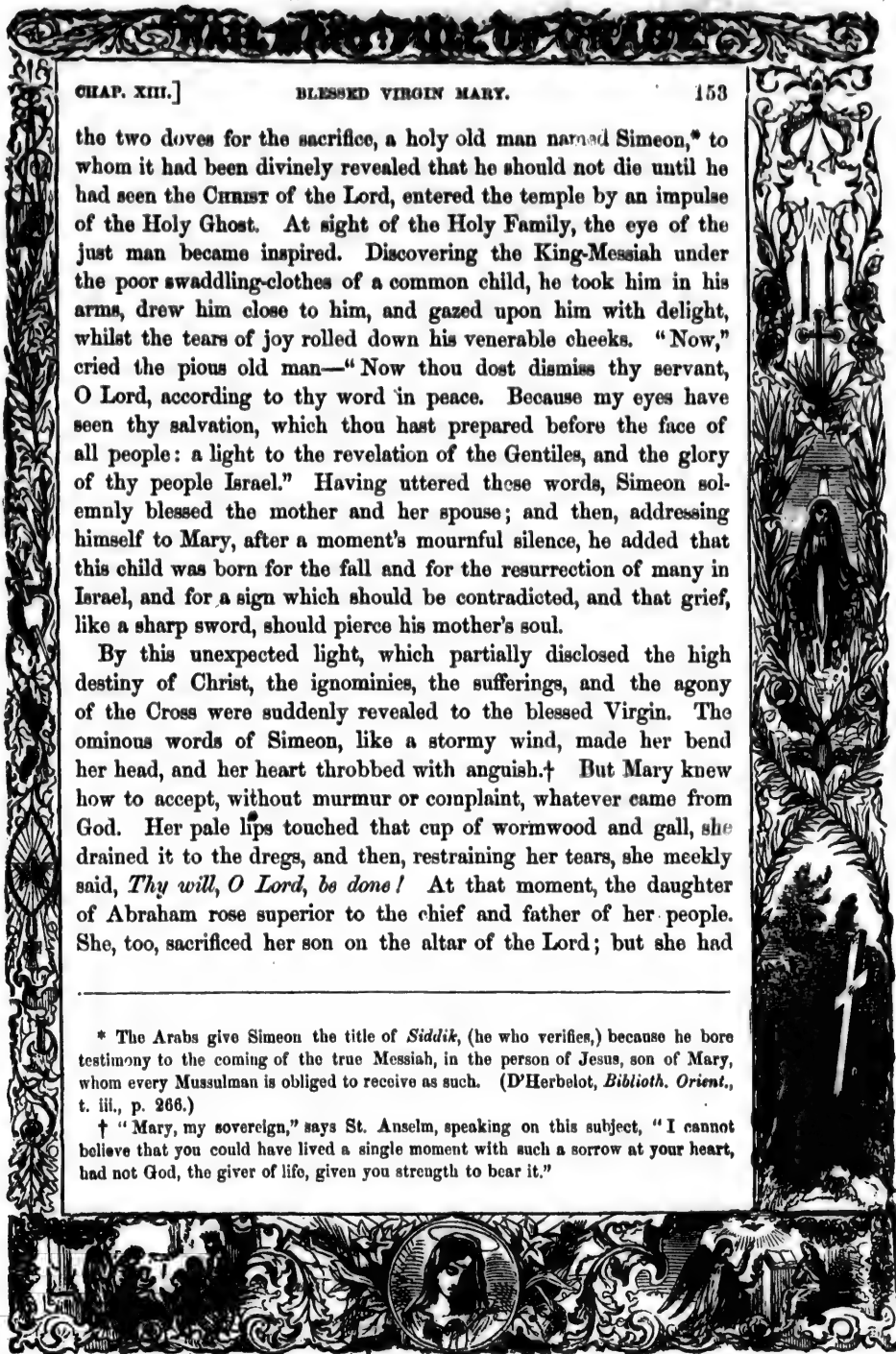
* About half a league from Jerusalem stands the monastery of the Holy Cross. Inside its chapel is shown the spot which was occupied by the barren olive tree of which the Cross was made. The place where the trunk stood is now filled up by a block of marble in a niche under the high altar, where there is a lamp continually burning.

the two doves for the sacrifice, a holy old man named Simeon,* to whom it had been divinely revealed that he should not die until he had seen the CHRIST of the Lord, entered the temple by an impulse of the Holy Ghost. At sight of the Holy Family, the eye of the just man became inspired. Discovering the King-Messiah under the poor swaddling-clothes of a common child, he took him in his arms, drew him close to him, and gazed upon him with delight, whilst the tears of joy rolled down his venerable cheeks. "Now," cried the pious old man—"Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace. Because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." Having uttered these words, Simeon solemnly blessed the mother and her spouse; and then, addressing himself to Mary, after a moment's mournful silence, he added that this child was born for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which should be contradicted, and that grief, like a sharp sword, should pierce his mother's soul.

By this unexpected light, which partially disclosed the high destiny of Christ, the ignominies, the sufferings, and the agony of the Cross were suddenly revealed to the blessed Virgin. The ominous words of Simeon, like a stormy wind, made her bend her head, and her heart throbbed with anguish.† But Mary knew how to accept, without murmur or complaint, whatever came from God. Her pale lips touched that cup of wormwood and gall, she drained it to the dregs, and then, restraining her tears, she meekly said, *Thy will, O Lord, be done!* At that moment, the daughter of Abraham rose superior to the chief and father of her people. She, too, sacrificed her son on the altar of the Lord; but she had

* The Arabs give Simeon the title of *Siddik*, (he who verifies,) because he bore testimony to the coming of the true Messiah, in the person of Jesus, son of Mary, whom every Mussulman is obliged to receive as such. (D'Herbelot, *Biblioth. Orient.*, t. iii., p. 266.)

† "Mary, my sovereign," says St. Anselm, speaking on this subject, "I cannot believe that you could have lived a single moment with such a sorrow at your heart, had not God, the giver of life, given you strength to bear it."



the sad certainty that her sacrifice would be accepted, and *she was a mother!*

She was still revolving in her mind these lofty thoughts, when there came in a prophetess named Anna, wife of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser, who was far advanced in years. This holy widow remained continually in the temple, serving God night and day in prayer and fasting. Seeing the divine child, she began to praise the Lord aloud, and to speak of him to all those who expected the redemption of Israel.

"Not only," says St. Ambrose, "did angels, prophets, and shepherds proclaim the birth of the Saviour, but also the just, and the ancients of Israel. A Virgin conceives, a barren woman brings forth, a dumb man speaks, Elizabeth prophesies, the Magi adore, the child in his mother's womb leaps for joy, a widow confesses that wondrous event, and all the just expect it."

As women might not enter the inner court of the temple, where the child was to be offered to the Lord, because of his sex, Joseph himself carried him into the *hall of the first-born*, asking himself whether the scenes which had marked the entrance of Jesus into the holy house were to be renewed before the Hebrew pontiffs. But nothing revealed the Infant-God in that privileged part of the temple; all there remained dull and cold, notwithstanding the radiant presence of the young Sun of Justice. A priest who was unknown to Joseph carelessly received from the hard hands of the man of labour, whom he regarded as *the scum of the world*,* the timid birds prescribed by the law, and did not even deign to honour CHRIST with a look. The love of gold—that shameful idolatry, which conceals its unholy worship when it has still the grace to be ashamed of it—had totally petrified the narrow, selfish, vindictive† heart of the princes of the synagogue. Leaving a monopoly of the toils and privations to the simple Levites, whom they

* Prideaux, *Histoire des Juifs*.

† There was then, and still is, amongst the Jewish doctors, a horrifying doctrine: they hold that he who nourishes not his hatred, and takes not revenge, is unworthy the title of Rabbi. (Basnage, l. vi., ch. 17.)

reduced to live on herbs and dry figs,* they passed by the poor man lying on their marble threshold, the wounded traveller stretched on the mountain path, coldly averting their head. At bottom, they loved neither God nor man. And hence it was that our Lord, who HIMSELF instituted a priesthood of charity, bitterly reproached them with this in the parable of the good Samaritan. Thus, as Malachy had foretold, *God cursed their blessings*, and turned away from his temple, which he was soon after to deliver to the fire and sword of the Romans.

The presence of the Messiah, which inflamed the heart of the disciples of Emmaüs even before they had recognized him in the breaking of bread, passed over the soul of the Aaronites as the first ray of spring passes over the eternal snows of Ararat. That solemn moment, which suspended the angelic concerts, and fixed the attention of the heavenly hosts on a single point of the universe—that moment, foretold by Aggeus, when the glory of the second temple effaced that of the first—that moment passed unnoticed before the darkened vision of the priests and doctors. There was none to recognize *the clean offering* mentioned by Malachy. The Desired of all nations—HIM whose way the angels had prepared—the great Redeemer, so long promised and so long expected, was there, bodily, in his holy house, and no one thought of welcoming him with palms, crying out on the watch-towers of the temple and the house-tops of Jerusalem, *Hosanna to the Son of David!* They knew well, as the Gospel says, how to predict the approach of rain by the clouds which rose from the west; they could foretell heat by the blowing of the south wind: but these men, so clever in drawing presages from the different aspects of the heavens, saw not that *the fig-tree of Solomon was about to put forth its fruit*, and they could not discover the God in that humble child. Oh,

* The luxury and avarice of the chief priests of Jerusalem were incredible. They sent out and collected the tithes through the country, taking all to themselves, and leaving the inferior priests wholly destitute. At the first remonstrance, the unhappy Levites, accused of revolt and sedition, were given over to the Romans, and governor Felix alone threw forty of them into prison in order to propitiate the doctors and princes of the Synagogue. (Josephus, *Vita*.)

poverty! what a disguise thou art, even for the divine nature! The real CHRIST was in the midst of his own, but he was poor, and his own received him not; hence they remained without a Saviour, for no *Melech-Hamaschiak* ever came to justify their incredulous contempt for the divine Son of the Virgin, and they are reduced to cry, with cool, yet despairing malice, *Perish those who compute the time of the Messiah!**

Meanwhile, the infant God, who had recognized, along the streets of Jerusalem, the different stages of the passion, silently distinguished his future executioners amid that grave and glittering crowd; amongst the choirs who sang on the harp hymns of praise to the Eternal, Christ distinguished the loud, discordant voices which were one day to cry: *Crucify him! Crucify him!*

Race of Aaron, where art thou now? The vengeful breath of the Crucified has scattered thee, like chaff, over all the earth; swallowed up in those masses which thou didst so despise, thy companions in exile know thee no more! But caring little, at that time, for the clouds which darkened above their heads, the Hebrew priests offered to that God who spurned their gifts, the chosen victims of both high and low. One of them took Joseph's doves, ascended the gentle slope of the altar of holocausts, and offered to the Lord that simple and humble sacrifice.

"After" Joseph and Mary "had performed all things according to the law of the Lord," says St. Luke, "they returned into Galilee, to their city Nazareth."†

* Basnage, l. vi., ch. 26. Talmud, 349.

† We have followed the opinion of St. Luke, St. John Chrysostom, and some other authorities, in making the Holy Family set out for Nazareth immediately after the Purification. It is the only way to reconcile St. Matthew—who says nothing of the marvellous events of the Presentation—with St. Luke, who is silent as to the massacre of the Innocents, and the flight into Egypt. "What shall we say to reconcile these two evangelists," says St. John Chrysostom, "except that the return to Nazareth preceded the flight into Egypt? For God did not command Joseph and Mary to go into Egypt before the Purification, lest the law might be left unfulfilled. But, that duty accomplished, they returned of themselves to Nazareth where they received the order to fly into Egypt."



CHAPTER XIV.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

SCARCELY were they returned into Lower Galilee, when Joseph and Mary had to set out again on a long and perilous journey, ending in the land of exile. One night, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, during his sleep. "Arise," said he, "take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him." At these words, Joseph rose affrighted, adored the Lord, and ran to awake Mary, who was sweetly sleeping beside her child. The young mother quickly understood the necessity of this abrupt and secret departure. She casts a look of anguish on her son, and hastily collects a few clothes and some provisions for the journey; then, preceded by Joseph, and carrying Jesus in her arms, she quits her native city reposing in the calm star-light.

The prophecies of Simeon were speedily accomplished. Scarcely was Jesus born, when a tyrant's persecution sought him in his cradle, and his mother, so young, so holy, was forced to fly by night like a guilty creature, accompanied only by an aged man who could only oppose prayer and patience to the Arab spears which, perchance, lay in ambush in the mountain ravine, or to the murderous attack of Herod's soldiers. It would seem as though God himself abandoned that holy family to its fate, for, when giving the order for Joseph to set out, his messenger had not promised, as Raphael did of old to the young Tobias, to guard them on the way. But the Virgin's spouse understood that, the solemn moment of CHRIST's manifestation not being yet come, God would save them from the devices of Herod by means of mere human prudence. To Joseph, then, belonged all the care, and all the honour, of that arduous enterprise; it was for him—a poor, obscure old man—to thwart the plans, to defeat the schemes, to elude the jealous watchfulness of a gloomy, politic tyrant who was served by his myrmidons like an Eastern despot. What was to happen, and what was to be done, if any danger presented

itself on the Jerusalem road? The sudden departure of the Magi had aroused the suspicions of Herod, and those suspicions were strengthened by the words of Anna and Simeon; secret inquiries, dark investigations were already on foot, and none might say where that sanguinary prince would stop, he who filled with gold the red hand of the assassin. The more Joseph pondered, the more clearly he foresaw some horrible tragedy, the very thought of which made the blood curdle in his veins. Mary, on her side, pale and silent as death, kept looking forward into the depth of the valley, the shade of the woods, or along the wild sinuosity of the rocky path which Joseph had chosen as the safest, and the most remote from the dwellings of men. The soft moonlight illumined the earth, and guided the silent march of the holy travellers.

"The weather was still cold,"* says St. Bonaventure, "and, while crossing Palestine, the Holy Family had to choose the wildest and least frequented roads. Where were they to lodge during the night? Where can they venture to rest a little during the day? Where are they to take the frugal meal necessary to sustain their strength?"†

Tradition is silent on most of the details of this touching and perilous pilgrimage. Doubtless, the holy travellers made long and painful marches through the mountains, availing themselves of the first hours of day, and often, too, awaiting the rising of the moon to resume their journey. Whilst their way lay through Galilee, they found places of rest and shelter in its deep caves, with their secret branches winding no one knew whither; but even these had their dangers, for they were often chosen as a secure hiding place by some of those numerous bands of robbers who had long bid defiance to all the forces of the kingdom, and who were now emboldened by the illness of Herod.‡ The fear of happening

* About the middle of February, when it is still very cold in the mountains of the interior, where the temperature, according to M. Volney, is nearly like ours; on the plains of Syria, on the contrary, it was already the heat of summer. (See note 3 of ch. vi.)

† St. Bonaventure, *De Vita Christi*.

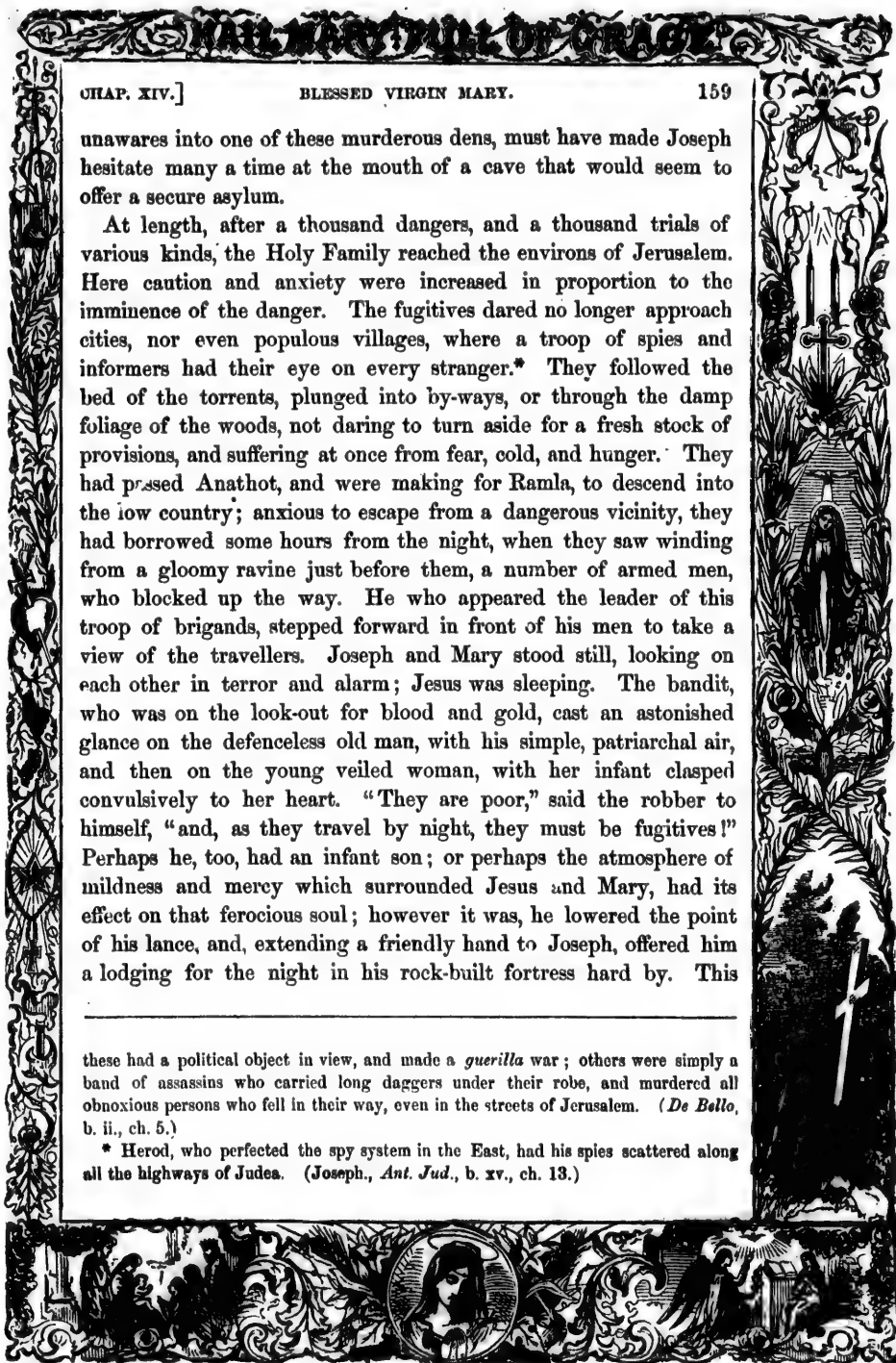
‡ These armed bands, often two or three thousand strong, were commanded by experienced chiefs, who gave both Herod and the Romans enough to do. Some of

unawares into one of these murderous dens, must have made Joseph hesitate many a time at the mouth of a cave that would seem to offer a secure asylum.

At length, after a thousand dangers, and a thousand trials of various kinds, the Holy Family reached the environs of Jerusalem. Here caution and anxiety were increased in proportion to the imminence of the danger. The fugitives dared no longer approach cities, nor even populous villages, where a troop of spies and informers had their eye on every stranger.* They followed the bed of the torrents, plunged into by-ways, or through the damp foliage of the woods, not daring to turn aside for a fresh stock of provisions, and suffering at once from fear, cold, and hunger. They had passed Anathot, and were making for Ramla, to descend into the low country; anxious to escape from a dangerous vicinity, they had borrowed some hours from the night, when they saw winding from a gloomy ravine just before them, a number of armed men, who blocked up the way. He who appeared the leader of this troop of brigands, stepped forward in front of his men to take a view of the travellers. Joseph and Mary stood still, looking on each other in terror and alarm; Jesus was sleeping. The bandit, who was on the look-out for blood and gold, cast an astonished glance on the defenceless old man, with his simple, patriarchal air, and then on the young veiled woman, with her infant clasped convulsively to her heart. "They are poor," said the robber to himself, "and, as they travel by night, they must be fugitives!" Perhaps he, too, had an infant son; or perhaps the atmosphere of mildness and mercy which surrounded Jesus and Mary, had its effect on that ferocious soul; however it was, he lowered the point of his lance, and, extending a friendly hand to Joseph, offered him a lodging for the night in his rock-built fortress hard by. This

these had a political object in view, and made a *guerilla* war; others were simply a band of assassins who carried long daggers under their robe, and murdered all obnoxious persons who fell in their way, even in the streets of Jerusalem. (*De Bello*, b. ii., ch. 5.)

* Herod, who perfected the spy system in the East, had his spies scattered along all the highways of Judea. (*Joseph, Ant. Jud.*, b. xv., ch. 13.)



frank offer was accepted with a holy confidence, and the brigand's roof was as hospitable, on that occasion, as the Arab tent.* On the following day, about noon, the Holy Family stopped in the shade of a vast forest of palms, nopals, and wild fig-trees, which is situated at a short distance from Ramla;† a bed of amaranths, narcissuses, and anemones, received the Lord of heaven and earth; the heat of summer was abroad on the plain, and the warbling of birds, the odour of plants, the thick shade of the fig-trees, and the distant murmur of a rivulet, lulled the divine infant to sleep. After a short and fearful halt, the travellers resumed their journey. There is no knowing why it was that they directed their course towards Bethlehem; tradition has preserved the memory of their visit, and Christians have erected an altar in the cave where Mary hid with her child‡ whilst Joseph went up to the city, either to inquire about the departure of a caravan, or to exchange Mary's gentle, but slow palfry, for a camel. Whatever motive it might have been that drew Joseph and Mary into the crater of the volcano, it is certain that they staid but a few hours, and that they thence hastened to gain a maritime town of the Philistines, there to join the first caravan destined for Egypt.

According to the learned calculations of chronologers, who admit of no interval in this long journey, the holy couple must have found a caravan at once setting out from the Syrian coast. This is the more likely inasmuch as the spring equinox was drawing near, so that every traveller would be anxious to outstrip the season when the *simoom* sweeps over the desert, rendering its sands as treacher

* The site where local tradition places this scene, and where the ruins of the brigand's fortress are still seen, bears even now a bad character. During the Crusades, the Franks, to whom this tradition was familiar, converted the bandi. chief into a feudal lord; "it is, nevertheless, a rare thing," says Father Nau, with amusing coolness, "for a great lord to turn highway robber." The Crusaders knew what they were about better than Father Nau. There has been added to this legend—which appears authentic—an embellishment for which we do not vouch, viz., that the hospitable brigand was no other than the good thief in person.

† It is a charming spot which tradition points out as one of the resting places of the Holy Family; there are now seen there the ruins of a monastery.

‡ This cave is called *The Grotto of the Virgin's Milk*, because it is thought that some drops of Mary's milk fell on the rock whilst she nursed her divine infant.

ous as the ocean-wave.* Excepting only the mortal dread of Herod's pursuit, the latter part of the journey was just as much marked by fatigue, suffering, and even insecurity. On leaving Gaza, whose dilapidated towers reëchoed the hoarse murmur of the waves, our travellers saw before them only immense wastes of sand, dreary, desolate, and fearfully naked, agitated by the scorching wind of the desert, and overhung by a fiery sky. Not a trace of vegetation, save, perchance, an occasional patch of heath stretching here and there across the desolate waste; no water, except the brackish spring, which the Virgin and Joseph, who were tired, poor, and unprotected, were only allowed to approach after the rich merchants, their slaves, and their camels, had drained it dry, so that they could barely take up a little of the thick, muddy water, in the hollow of their hand. According as they receded from the frontiers of Syria, the thirst became greater, and the water more scarce. At times, there was seen afar off, amid the interminable plain, a large lake, blue and sparkling as that of Gennesareth; the sky was reflected in its limpid waters, with one solitary date-tree; the camels were hurried on, and Mary raised her head, drooping like the rose of Jericho when bent by the rain.† That blessed lake was gained; already was the raging thirst quenched in imagination; but, O misery! some mocking demon removed the lake some leagues farther, and left in its place only burning sand.‡

Another optical illusion which frequently takes place in those

* The Arabs call the hot wind of the desert *simoom*, or poison; some idea of it may be conceived by standing for a moment at the mouth of a common baking-oven, when the bread is taken out. These winds are more frequent during the fifty days on either side of the solstice. (Volney, *Voyage en Syrie*.)

† This rose, whose corolla opens and shuts according to the changes of the atmosphere, is consulted as a barometer by the Arabs. (Vicomte de Marcellus, *Voyage en Orient*, t. ii.)

‡ This is the phenomenon commonly known as *mirage*. During the expedition of the French to Egypt, in 1798, the soldiers crossing those fiery deserts, consumed with thirst, were often deceived by this cruel illusion. Every object rising from the soil, amid those seas of sand, appeared to them surrounded by water; thus a little mountain which they perceived afar off, seemed to them to rise from the midst of a lake. Dying with thirst, they hastened thither, but only to find themselves grievously mistaken; the lake had fled, and was now farther than ever from their longing eyes. (See De Fellens, *du Mirage*, Art. 6.)

arid and scorching regions, appears to the distant travellers in gigantic proportions. Arab horsemen, covered with their floating abbas with brown and golden stripes, and armed with the djombié—a dagger with a crooked blade, which every inhabitant of the desert wears in his girdle—appeared from afar of the height of lofty towers, seeming as though they moved in the air. The Virgin shuddered, and drew Jesus closer to her bosom, but her fears were calmed by the serene countenance of Joseph, though even he could assign no reason for the strange phenomenon.*

At the approach of night, the song of the camel-drivers ceased,† the leader of the caravan hoisted the flag which was the signal for halting, and all the travellers gathered around the spot. An animated scene quickly followed. The camels, squatting down at the feet of their masters, were freed from their heavy burdens; bales of goods were heaped up pyramidically; a circle of stakes was planted around, and to these the beasts of burden were fastened; the wealthy travellers had their tents erected, and the master of the caravan placed sentinels who were to give notice of the approach of the Bedouins—those pirates of the desert—who were then, and still are, plunderers like Ishmael, and hospitable as Abraham. Each merchant, after having taken his repast of dates and milk, lay down to sleep under his tent, awaiting the rising of the moon. The slaves, and the poorer travellers—amongst whom were the Son of God, his divine Mother, and Joseph—seated themselves on a rush mat spread on the ground, with no other covering than the sky,

* "I had occasion," says Niebuhr, "to remark a phenomenon which struck me as very singular, but which, in time, became familiar to me. An Arab mounted on a camel, whom I saw at a distance, appeared to me as high as a tower, and seemed to move in the air; nevertheless, he was walking on the sand like ourselves. This optical illusion proceeds from the stronger refraction of the atmosphere in those arid regions laden with vapours of a very different nature from those which fill the air in temperate climates." (*Voyage en Arabie*, t. i., p. 208.)

† It is an almost universal custom in the East for people to enliven their journey or their work by singing. A Mussulman pilgrim has given a very picturesque description of the nightly march of a caravan from Mecca, lit by the lanterns placed on the camels, and cheered by the modulated song of the drivers. (*Travels of Abdoul Kerim*) The camel-drivers still sing songs peculiar to themselves, in Syria and in Egypt. (*Corres. d'Orient*, t. vi.)

with the cold night air falling chill and moist on their shivering and exhausted limbs.* Now and then there was heard a cry of alarm: some band of Arabs was discovered prowling around the sleeping caravan; disconcerted by the vigilance of the watchmen, a shower of arrows announced their departure, instantly followed by the groans of the wounded. Then the Virgin, who had bent over her divine son, so as to make a rampart of her own body raised to heaven her tearful eyes and her grief-worn brow: she knew but too well that her Jesus was subject to death like all the children of men!

When the moon shed her mild light over the shadeless and noiseless desert, where no blade of grass waved in the midnight air, the tents were folded up, and the dreary journey resumed, with all its inconveniences, all its sufferings, all its terrors.

At length, the outskirts of that strange and silent region were gained. Egypt—that ancient nursery of all knowledge and of all idolatry—presented itself to the travellers, with its red granite obelisks, its colossal pyramids, its temples crowned with burnished steel,† its island-like villages, and its providential river fringed with reeds and covered with boats. That country appeared more rich, more populous, more commercial, than Judea, but still it was the land of exile! Beyond the desert was *home*, and there lay the heart of the banished children of Israel.

After a journey of one hundred and forty leagues,‡ the fugitives reached Heliopolis, where there was a colony of their people. In that city arose the temple of Jehovah which Onias had constructed on the plan of the Holy House. The ornaments of that Egyptian temple almost equalled those of the other, only, as a token of

* Though at this season it is burning hot during the day, in the desert, yet the nights are extremely cold. (Voln.—Sav.)

† On the dome of the sanctuary in the principal temple of Heliopolis, there was an immense mirror of polished steel which reflected every ray of light. There was just such another on the top of the lighthouse of Alexandria, and the image of vessels coming into port was reflected in it long before they appeared on the horizon. (*Corresp. d'Orient*, t. v. *Lettres de Savary*.)

‡ *Vid. Barad.*, t. i., ch. 8. The author of *Voyages de Jesus Christ* reckons but a hundred leagues, but he probably overlooks the winding and turning of the roads.



inferiority, a massive golden lamp, suspended from the roof, replaced the famous candlestick of Jerusalem with its seven branches. At the gate of that city, which was chiefly inhabited by Egyptians and Arab idolaters, there was a majestic tree, of the mimosa kind, to which the Arabs of Yemen, settled on the banks of the Nile, paid a species of worship.* At the approach of the Holy Family, this idol-tree slowly bent its shady branches, as if saluting the young master of nature, whom Mary carried in her arms;† and, if we may believe the historian Palladius, at the moment when the divine travellers passed under the granite arches of the gate of Heliopolis, all the idols of a neighbouring temple fell prostrate on the ground.‡

Joseph and Mary only passed through the city of the sun, and repaired to Matarieh, a pretty village shaded with sycamores, and having the only fountain of fresh water to be found in Egypt. There, in a habitation like a bee-hive, where the doves made their nest, the persecuted family found rest and peace, being at last free from the power of Herod.

That cruel prince, having vainly expected the Magi in his palace of Jericho, his favourite residence, learned, at last, that they had repassed the frontiers of his kingdom, and that, regardless of his injunctions, they had returned to Persia, without letting him know the result of their mission. Pale already from the slow fever which was wearing him away, the king of the Jews became paler still with

* The Arabs, who had gradually forgotten the God of Abraham, at that time adored a multitude of idols, one more fantastic than the other. "The date tree," says Azrakî, "was worshipped by the tribe of Khozua, and the Beni-Thekif venerated a rock; a large tree, named *zat arouat*, was adored by the Koreisch, &c. The Persians contemptuously distinguished the Arabs as *worshippers of stones*."

† We owe this incident to Sozomenes, and it is rather hazardous to bring it forward in this scoffing age, though it is, after all, scarcely a miracle. It is certain that there exists in Arabia a tree of the sensitive kind, which bends its branches at the approach of man. Niebuhr, who is not at all suspected of credulity, found that tree in Yemen, and the Arabs, who call it *the hospitable tree*, hold it in such high veneration that no one is permitted to pluck a leaf. If that mimosa, by a natural phenomenon, bends its branches at the approach of man, how much more likely is it to do so at the approach of the Son of God?

‡ Palladius is not the only one who relates this miracle: Dorothy martyr, Sozomenes, St. Anselm, St. Bonaventure, Lira, Denis the Carthusian, Testat, Ladolphus, Baradius, &c., likewise attest it.

anger. He was himself duped at the very moment when he revelled in the thought of his unrivalled dexterity in deceiving others duped by those "uncircumcised dogs" who had so unexpectedly penetrated the very depths of his tortuous policy! . . . If the Magi had not found the child to whom they were led by the star, they would have come back and told him. . . . They had, then, discovered his secret asylum, which must be somewhere about Bethlehem, since they had extended their search no farther. . . . Now, how was that dangerous child to be distinguished from all others? There was but one way to make sure of his destruction: to include all in a general massacre. . . . But the people! At that thought the old king paused a moment; then, a strange, a contemptuous smile curled his haughty lip. "The people dare nothing," said Herod, "against kings who dare all!"— . . . "And sending, he killed all the men-children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men."^{*}

According to many grave authors,[†] supported by tradition and probability, the Holy Family remained seven years in Egypt. Traces of their sojourn are still found there; the fountain where Mary went to wash the Child's swaddling clothes,[‡] the bushy knoll where she dried them in the sun, the sycamore in whose shade she loved to sit with her Son on her knee,[§] are still pointed out, after

* This evangelical fact, which the disciples of Voltaire have called in question, is proved not only by our sacred books, but also by the testimony of Jews and Pagans. (Macrobius, b. xi., ch. 4, *des Saturnales*. Orig. *Contr. Cels.*, b. xi., ch. 58. Toldos Huld., pp. 12, 14, 20.)

† *Vid. Trombel, in Vit. Deipn.—Zachariam, in diss. ad hist. eccl.—Anselm. —Cantual.—Euseb.—S. Tho.*

‡ This is still called *Mary's Fountain*; there is an ancient tradition to the effect that the Blessed Virgin used to bathe the child Jesus in its limpid water. In the first ages of Christianity, the faithful built a church there; in later times, the Mussulmans also constructed a mosque; and the disciples of both creeds went to *Mary's Fountain* for the cure of their diseases. The fountain is still there; the pilgrimages still continue, but both the church and the mosque have long since disappeared. (Savary, t. i., p. 122. *Corresp d'Orient*, t. vi., p. 3.)

§ "Not far from the fountain, I was shown an inclosure planted with trees; a

the lapse of eighteen hundred years. The pilgrims of Europe and of Asia know these objects well, and they are held in reverence by the Egyptians themselves. To each of these clings, like the moss to the damp walls of the ruined monastery, some simple legend of other days.*

In Nazareth, Mary had led an humble and laborious life; but in Heliopolis, she descended into the depths of poverty, and saw misery under every aspect.

The holy couple were left entirely to their own resources, amongst a people who were parcelled out into national and hereditary corporations, and who were by no means favourable to strangers. "They being poor," observes St. Basil, "it is clear that they had to work very hard in order to procure the necessaries of life and even those—were they always able to obtain them?" "Often," says Landolph, of Saxony, "Often did it happen, that the child Jesus, pressed by hunger, asked his mother for bread, when she had none to give him."

Meanwhile, Herod had died of a horrible and nameless malady, after being literally eaten alive by worms. Occupied to the last, with thoughts of how the people would rejoice at the news of his death, he implored his sister Salome—a very wicked woman—im-

Musulman, who acted as our guide, made us stop before a sycamore, saying: *That is the tree of Jesus and Mary.* Vansleb, priest of Fontainebleau, relates that the ancient sycamore fell, from age, in 1058; the Franciscans of Cairo piously preserve in their sacristy, the last remains of that tree; in the garden there only remained a stump, of which the tree we saw was doubtless a shoot. General Kleber, after his victory of Heliopolis, made a pilgrimage to the tree of the Holy Family; he carved his name on the bark of one of the branches, but that name has since disappeared, effaced by time, or by some envious hand." (*Corresp. d'Orient*, t. vi., lettre 141.)

* The following is one of the legends brought from Eastern climes by one of our old French barons, the Seigneur d'Englure; we give it verbatim, in all its artless grace:—"When Our Lady, the Mother of God, had crossed the desert, and reached this place, she laid Our Lord on the ground, and went all around in quest of water, but there was no water to be found. She went back, sad and sorrowful, to her dear child, where he lay on the sand, but, behold! he had stuck his heels into the ground until a fountain of clear, sweet water gushed out. Our Lady was overjoyed at this, and thanked her son, Our Lord. She then washed Our Lord's clothes in the water of this fountain, and spread them on the ground to dry, and every drop of water that trickled from those clothes sprang up into a bush, which bushes bear balm, &c."



plored her with tears to have some Jewish nobles—the flower of their nation, whom he had kept imprisoned for that purpose—put to death, in order that the people might be forced to weep at his funeral.* He was borne to his castle of Herodion in a golden litter covered with scarlet and adorned with precious stones. His sons and his army followed his remains with a dejected air, whilst the people, proud of their deliverance, heaped curses upon him as the procession passed along.

Apprised in a dream, by the Angel of the Lord, that Herod was dead, Joseph returned with Mary and the child into the land of Israel; “but hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither: and, being warned in sleep, retired into the quarters of Galilee.”

* Joseph., *Ant. Jud.*, b. xvii., ch. 8. The memory of Herod was held in such detestation by the princes of the people and the priests, that they instituted a festival to be celebrated on the 25th of September in joyful commemoration of that prince's death. *There is a feast on the 7th of September, says the Jewish calendar, on account of the death of Herod; for he had hated the wise, and they rejoice before the Lord when the impious leave this world.* (Basnage, t. 1, liv. ii., ch. 8.)



CHAPTER XV.

MARY IN NAZARETH.

AN! how mournful are the days of exile and how sweet it is to breathe once more the air of our native land! The bread of the stranger, like that of the wicked, is hard to eat and bitter to the heart; the streams of the foreign land murmur not tales of our childish sports; the song of its birds wants one melodious note; its scenes, however fair, have not that sweet, that soothing charm which endears every object in our own land!

How great must have been the joy of the holy spouses on again beholding that land of Chanaan, whose stately hills, waving outlines, harmonious scenery, and endless variety, contrasted so happily and so strikingly with the monotonous splendours of Egypt! Here, a bold and active population, martial, frank and gay, with a pure and holy worship; there, slaves shackled by castes, addicted to theft, mixing up the most infamous practices in their senseless worship, and lavishing their treasures in building temples to the ox Apis, the crocodile and the sea-onion. One must be profoundly religious, like Joseph and Mary, and love his country as the Hebrews loved theirs, in order to comprehend the delightful emotions wherewith they greeted the land of Jehovah and their pretty town of Nazareth.

The Holy Family returned to their humble home, after so long an absence, amid the congratulations and endless questions of their friends and neighbours, who celebrated their return as an event of great joy; but the scene was soon and sadly changed. The neglected dwelling of Joseph was scarcely habitable; the roof, in some places, broken and falling in, had given free admission to the winter storm and the equinoctial rains;* the lower chamber was cold,

* The rainy season, in Judea, is that of the equinoxes, and especially the autumnal equinox; it is also the time of storms, accompanied by violent showers of rain or hail. (Volney, *Voyage en Syrie*.)

damp, and overgrown with weeds; wild doves made their nests in the sacred and mysterious cell where the Word was made flesh; the little court was overrun with briars; everything, in short, in and around that time-honoured dwelling, had assumed that ruinous and desolate aspect which rests on deserted houses like the seal of the master's absence. These needful repairs were, then, to be made; furniture and tools, lost or broken, had to be replaced; and perhaps a debt contracted in Egypt, to defray the expense of the return, had to be discharged. It was, doubtless, at this juncture, that the little patrimony of Joseph was sold till the jubilee. All that remained, of what they had possessed before their departure, was the ruined house, the workshop, and their own arms; but Jesus was there. Young as he was, Jesus took an axe and followed his old foster-father to the villages where work was procured for them;* his labour, proportioned to his age and strength, was always devoted to his mother. Comfort had long disappeared; but they succeeded, by hard work and persevering industry, in obtaining the necessities of life. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph led a life of ceaseless toil, and He who might command legions of angels asked nothing from God for himself or his but their "daily bread."

The interior life of that blessed family, surnamed the *earthly trinity*, has not come to the knowledge of men; it is like the streamlet hidden in the long grass, or more properly, it is the Holy of Holies with his cloud of perfumes and his double veil. Nevertheless, by studying minutely, and examining one by one, under every point of view, the evangelical facts, what we know enables us to guess to a certain extent at what we do not know, and the public life of Jesus Christ throws some bright rays of light on his own hidden life and that of the Blessed Virgin. That sacred abyss we are about to sound with all the reserve, all the conscientious application, that so grave a subject requires.

Jesus, in whom were hidden all the treasures of wisdom and of

* St. Justin Martyr (*Dialog. cum Tryphone*) states that Jesus Christ assisted his foster-father to make yokes and ploughs. And Godescard, t. xiv., p. 436, *Vie de la Sainte Vierge*, says:—"A very ancient author asserts that, in his time, there were yokes to be seen which Our Saviour had made with his own hands."



knowledge,* had no need of human teaching; and the contrary supposition is positively condemned by the Church. St. John also, in his Gospel, mentions that the Jews, contemporaries of Jesus Christ, regarded him as a man who had "never learned,"† and the surprise of the Nazarenes, on seeing him so profoundly versed in sacred letters, shows clearly enough that he had not been, to their knowledge, brought up, like St. Paul, *at the feet of a master*. The Talmudists and the Jewish authors of the Toldos maintain, on the contrary, that a celebrated rabbin initiated Jesus in the mysteries of science and of magic; but, deducing from the second part of the assertion which is wholly absurd, and viewing the matter in a purely human light, as do the rationalists, this is evidently false for two reasons. Jesus was, at first, neither a zealot nor a traditionist, and it is everywhere apparent in the Gospel that he openly disapproved of the narrow views, the captious distinctions, and shallow subtilties of the Synagogue. In the second place, Rabbi Joshua Perachia, whom they name as his preceptor, was yet unborn, as he flourished an hundred years later.

To place Jesus amid the Rabbins in the capacity of a pupil would be just about as illogical as to try to support an oak by surrounding it with reeds. He taught not as the Scribes and Pharisees, says an Evangelist,‡ and that is easily conceived; for he derived his wisdom from himself; and his teachings, even viewing them in a natural way, seem to emanate from a soul lofty, pure, upright, and from a mind so vast and so uniformly sound that it never could have been perverted by scholastic disputes.

Strauss admits that all the wisdom and all the science of the period would have been unable to form such a man as Jesus Christ. "Even if Jesus had exhausted," says he, "all the sources of instruction then to be had, it is no less true that none of these elements would suffice, even remotely, to effect a revolution in the world, and the heaven necessary for so great a work he must have drawn from the depths of his own soul."

* St. Paul, *Ep. Colos.*, ch. ii, ver. 9.

† St. John, ch. vii., ver. 15.

‡ St. Matthew, ch. vii., ver. 29.

His eloquence, like his morality, was peculiar to himself. It was not the emphatic exaggerations of the Rabbins, nor yet the majestic, overwhelming and violently-contrasted diction of the ancient prophets; it was, as he himself said, a source of living water reflecting in its course the birds of the air, the crops and flowers of the field. That eloquence, so simple, penetrated to the very bottom of every thing and was easily connected with high and lofty ideas. Every word was a precious seed of virtue; every lesson threw afar, over the mysterious wastes of the future, a long train of light which was insensibly to spread into the perfect day of the world's regeneration. Even those who have audaciously denied his miracles were yet forced to acknowledge that his words were those of a God.*

Jesus was endowed with a high and meditative soul which required a vast space for its expansion; confined, during the day, at manual labour which occupied every moment of his time, he made up by night for his obscure toil, and was again the legislator and the prophet in presence of the starry heavens. Standing on the lofty terrace which commanded a view of the mountains and forests of the land of Chanaan, he poured out his soul before the Author of Nature, whose ambassador, whose son, and whose equal he was. These communings with God, in the silence of the night, of the desert and of thought, were customary with Jesus, as we see in many places of the Gospel. The model-man, the incarnate Word, would thus, we may suppose, instruct his own to distinguish the pure gold of prayer from the monstrous alloy of ostentation and hypocrisy wherewith the Pharisees of his time were wont to mix it up.

The Virgin, who was never either troublesome or exacting, placed no obstacle in the way of her Son's solitary habits; she knew that

* "I confess to you," says J. J. Rousseau, "that the majesty of the Scriptures astonishes me, and the sanctity of the Gospel speaks to my heart. Behold the books of our philosophers, with all their pretensions; how small they are, when compared with this! Can it be that a book, at once so simple and so sublime, is the work of men? Can it be that he whose history it records is himself but man? Is his the tone of an enthusiast or of an ambitious sectary? What sweetness! what purity in his morals! what touching grace in his instructions! what elevation in his precepts! what profound wisdom in his discourse!" (*Emile*, t. iii., p. 365.)



Jesus was then sounding the depth of the unfathomable abyss then opening under the feet of men, and that the world's redemption was to be the fruit of these silent meditations. Respecting the workings of that mighty spirit folded up within itself, and ever looking forward to that glorious future which every passing moment brought more near, Mary already beheld heaven opened, death overcome, and the Messiah gathering the nations around his standard. . . . But all of a sudden, she remembered the prediction of the old man in the temple, and its image arose, gloomy as a funeral-pall, at the end of that enchanting prospect; a shudder ran through every vein of the poor mother, and her heart, so absorbed in the love of Jesus, was torn asunder with anguished forebodings. A secret voice seemed to cry, "Blood must expiate sin!—CHRIST must die!" Then, leaving off the manual toil to which her poverty condemned her,* the daughter of David went to seek her Son; she longed to see him, to assure herself, by a maternal embrace, that he was still there, that he was yet living!

At her approach, Jesus withdrew his pensive glance from the starry heavens; his youthful brow, contracted by a thought as vast as the universe, became again the smooth, fair brow of the child! Mary then, driving back into her heart every mournful apprehension, advised him to seek repose. Strength must be recruited for the morrow's fatiguing labour. . . . The Son of God followed his mother in silence, for he loved and *was subject to her*.

The entrance of Jesus into adolescence was marked by an extraordinary incident, which gave Mary's soul a most violent shock. Joseph and Mary, faithful observers of the law of their fathers, went regularly every year to Jerusalem to celebrate the passover. This journey, which they made in secret so long as the throne of the Maccabees was filled by the son of the enemy of God, had now become more easy since the banishment of Archelaus and the occupation of the Romans. When Christ had attained his twelfth year, his parents, having the fear of Herod no longer before their eyes,

* Tertullian said, in the third century, that Mary earned her living by working; and Celsus, in the second century, said that Mary was a woman who had lived by the labour of her hands.



brought him with them to Jerusalem. They set out from Nazareth in a crowd; and, on the way, the Hebrew pilgrims formed themselves into little bands, according to age and sex, and the ties of family or friendship.*

With the Virgin, were Mary of Cleophas, the sister-in-law of Joseph; another Mary, mentioned in the Gospel as *altera Maria*; Salome, wife of Zebedee, come from Bethsaida with her husband and sons; Joanna, wife of Chus; and a number of Nazarean women her neighbours and friends. Joseph followed at some distance, in grave conversation with Zebedee, the fisherman, and the ancients of his tribe. Jesus walked with the young Galileans whom the Gospel, according to the peculiar genius of the Hebrew tongue, has called his brethren, they being his nearest relations.

Amongst this youthful group, who went before the others, the sons of Zebedee might be distinguished; James, impetuous as the sea of Tiberias on a stormy day; John, still younger than Jesus, and seeming, as he walked beside his brother, the true personification of the lamb of Isaiah dwelling in peace with the lion of the Jordan. Beside the fishermen of Bethsaida, whom Jesus afterwards surnamed *Boanerges* (sons of thunder), were the four sons of Alpheus; James who was subsequently bishop of Jerusalem, an austere and grave young man with long hair, pale face, and cold, subdued manner. Proud of having taken the Nazarite vow, he put on provoking airs of superiority towards him whom he then considered as the carpenter's son. In the character of James were seen the virtues and the imperfections inherent in the soil; immovable firmness, upright and religious inclinations, but at the same time, a strong contempt for all who were not of the race of Abraham, and an excellent opinion of himself. Jude, Simon, and Jose, the other sons of Alpheus, were youths of a rustic, simple, and warlike mien, already arrived at

* St. Epiphanius and St. Bernard inform us that, in these journeys, the men went in troops, separate from the women, and that St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin being thus one in one company and one in another, gave themselves at first no concern about the disappearance of Jesus, and indeed knew nothing of it till the evening, when all the travellers assembled together. See likewise Aelreûe, abbot of Revery, *Serm. seu tractatus de Jesu duodeni Dominica intra octav. Epiphan.*

adolescence, and regarding the son of the humble Mary as their inferior in every way—a feeling of which they could with difficulty divest themselves in after times, as we see by the Gospel.* And Jesus? Jesus affected nothing, neither devotion, nor austerity, nor wisdom, nor science, because he possessed the fullness of all those things, and people seldom affect anything but what they have not.

To see him clad so simply—like an Essenian—his long hair, of the colour of ancient bronze,† parted on his high sun-browned forehead and floating gracefully over his shoulders, one would have taken him for David as he presented himself to the prophet Samuel, small, timid, attired in a shepherd's dress, to receive the sacred unction. Yet there was something more in the soft brown eye of Jesus‡ than even in that of his great ancestor, gleaming as it was with the brightness of poetic inspiration; there was something penetrating and divine which laid bare the inmost thoughts and reached the most secret recesses of the soul; but Jesus then veiled the splendour of his look as Moses did his radiant brow on going forth from the tabernacle. He walked, then, in wise, yet appropriate conversation with his young kinsmen according to the flesh, whom he designed to make his apostles; he discovered, beneath their rough exterior, the weight and the value of those unpolished diamonds which were one day to shine with such surpassing splendour, and he loved them by anticipation. He was not deceived in his expectations; those men who had had, like the rest of the nation, their dreams of gold and

* St. John Chrysostom, *Serm.* 44.

† The Rabbins have taken occasion to make the most odious insinuations against Jesus on account of the colour of his hair; but what is most extraordinary is that they make precisely the same remarks on David. *He was red as Esau; he had blood on his head; the soul of Esau had passed into him.* They have only forgotten the evil eye wherewith they endow the prophet-king.

‡ Nicheph., *Hist. Eccles.*, t. i., p. 125. His portrait of our Lord, drawn from tradition, is the most authentic that we now have. The Rev. Mr. Walsh, author of a recent work devoted to the rare and unpublished monuments of the first age of Christianity, calls attention to a very curious medal, which was known so early as the fifteenth century. The front side represents the head of Our Lord in profile; the hair is divided after the manner of the Nazarenes, smooth to the ears, and waving on the shoulders; the beard bushy, and not very long; the features fine, as also the bust, over which the tunic falls in graceful folds.

power regarding the Messiah, cast away at his bidding all their prejudices, both national and religious, and adopted a calumniated doctrine, whose principles and whose promises, like the maledictions of the old law, spoke only of sufferings to endure and persecutions to encounter. They bound themselves to him by ties so strong that neither the princes of the earth, nor cold, nor nakedness, nor hunger, nor the sword could separate them from his love; they walked in his footsteps, courageously trampling on the thorns which the world threw in their way, and allowing themselves to be treated, for his sake, as the very scum of mankind. They were neither ashamed of the Son of man, nor of his Gospel, nor of *the folly of the Cross!* And why should they? It is for impostors to be ashamed, and the Apostles never preached but from sincere conviction. Those honest and simple hearts enforced their testimony by all that could render it credible and sacred amongst men; they abandoned all, suffered all, forgave all, and sealed with their blood the Gospel of their divine master.*

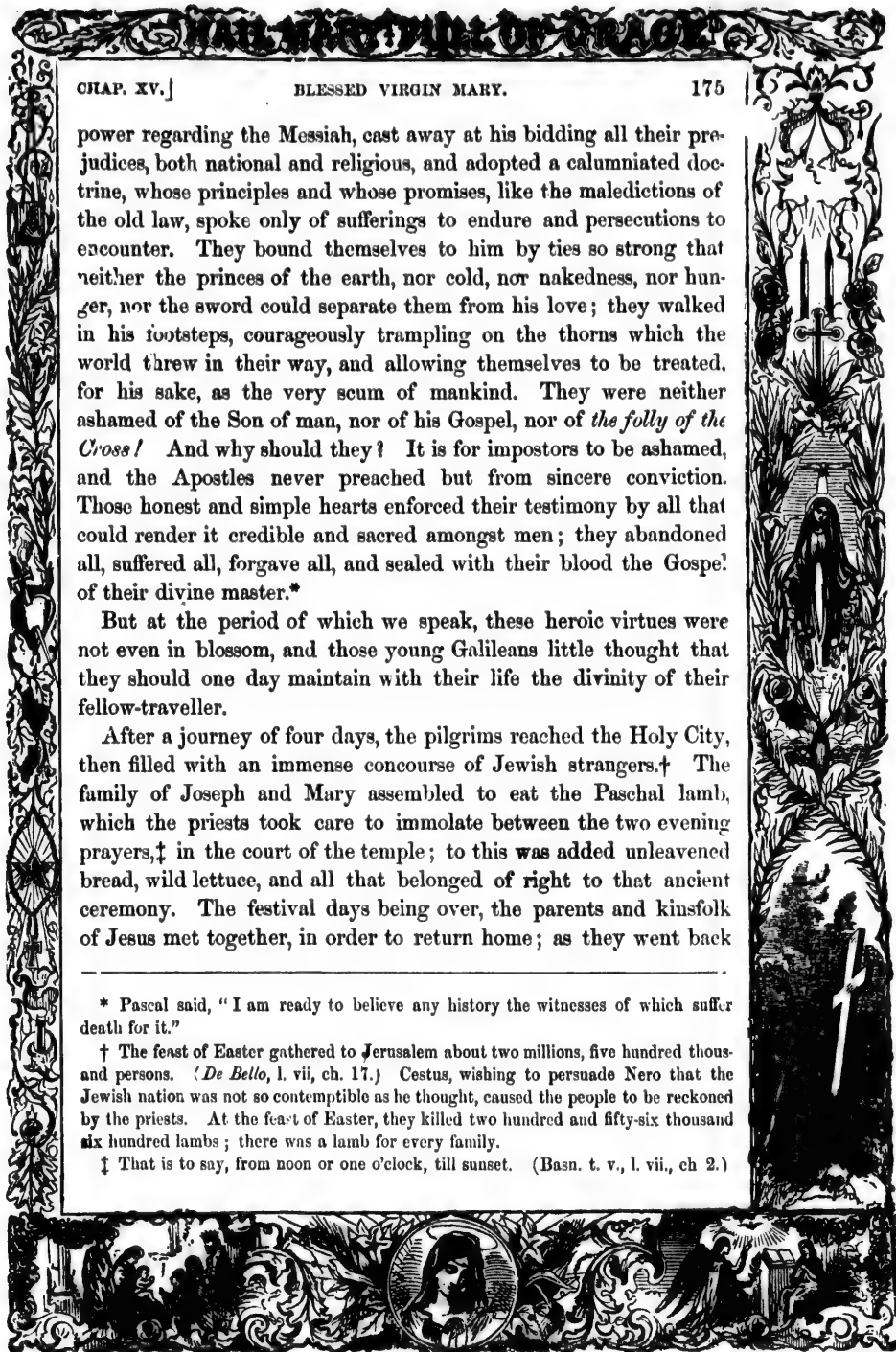
But at the period of which we speak, these heroic virtues were not even in blossom, and those young Galileans little thought that they should one day maintain with their life the divinity of their fellow-traveller.

After a journey of four days, the pilgrims reached the Holy City, then filled with an immense concourse of Jewish strangers.† The family of Joseph and Mary assembled to eat the Paschal lamb, which the priests took care to immolate between the two evening prayers,‡ in the court of the temple; to this was added unleavened bread, wild lettuce, and all that belonged of right to that ancient ceremony. The festival days being over, the parents and kinsfolk of Jesus met together, in order to return home; as they went back

* Pascal said, "I am ready to believe any history the witnesses of which suffer death for it."

† The feast of Easter gathered to Jerusalem about two millions, five hundred thousand persons. (*De Bello*, l. vii, ch. 17.) Cestus, wishing to persuade Nero that the Jewish nation was not so contemptible as he thought, caused the people to be reckoned by the priests. At the feast of Easter, they killed two hundred and fifty-six thousand six hundred lambs; there was a lamb for every family.

‡ That is to say, from noon or one o'clock, till sunset. (Basn. t. v., l. vii., ch. 2.)

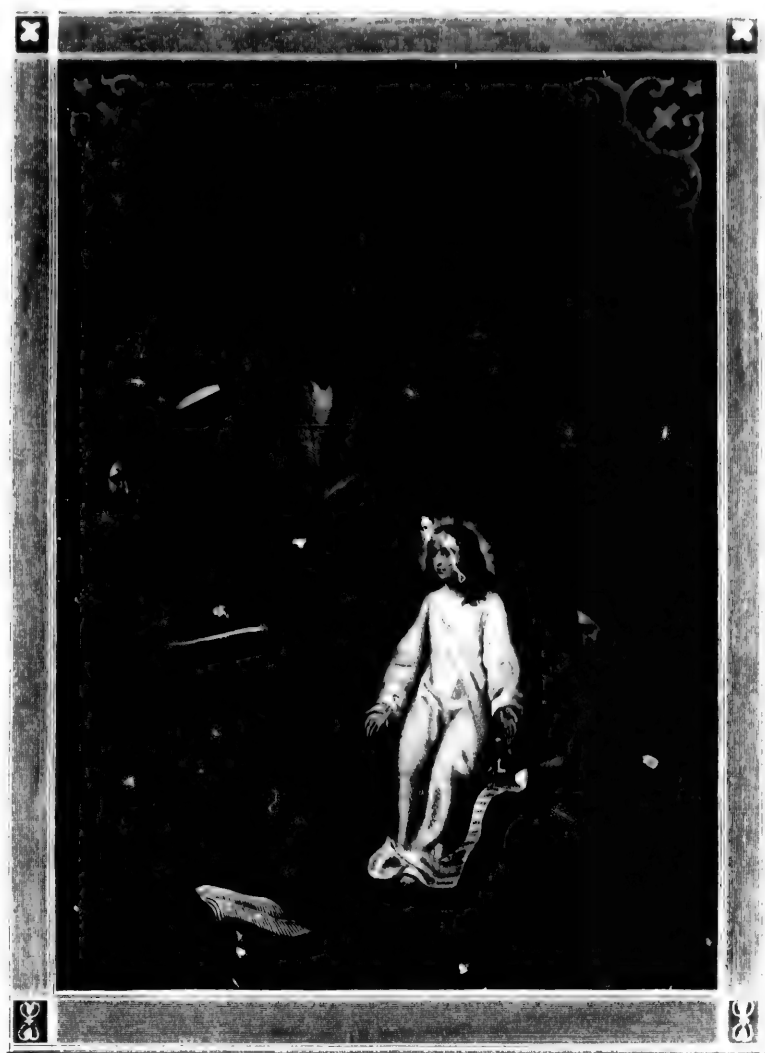


in the same order in which they came, it was not, at first, perceived that Jesus was missing. Mary thought him with Joseph, or the two James's; Joseph, on the other hand, thought him with his young kinsmen, or with Mary. At night-fall, the various companies came together, and the Virgin sought Jesus in vain amongst the crowd of travellers who arrived successively at the inn; no one knew what had become of him. The grief of the holy spouses was inexpressible. "The deposit of heaven, the Son of God!" murmured Joseph sadly. "My son!" said the poor young mother, her voice choked with sobs. All that night they sought him and all the following day, asking every one they met along the road, calling him in the woods, looking fearfully down the precipices, now fearing for his life, now for his liberty, and not knowing what was to happen if he were lost. They returned to Jerusalem; ran to the houses of their friends, and, tired of wandering through every part of that large city, they, at last, entered the temple. In the porch, where sat the doctors of the law, was a child who charmed the ancients of Israel by the depth of his observation and the clearness of his answers to questions, even the most difficult; they all stood in a circle round him, every one wondering within himself at his marvellous and precocious wisdom. "It is either Daniel, or an angel," said some one within a few paces of the sorrowful Virgin. "It is Jesus!" said the young mother, making her way through the doctors. Then, approaching the Messiah, with a look of tender reproach! "Son!" said she, mildly; "why hast thou done so to us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing?"

The child had disappeared before the God: the answer was dry and mysterious. "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know, that I must be about my Father's business?" The holy couple were silent; they did not, at first, comprehend the drift of this reply.

Jesus arose and followed them to Nazareth; his perfect submission to their will very soon effaced this light cloud. "And his mother kept all these things in her heart; and Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men."





CHAPTER XVI.

MARY AT THE SERMONS OF JESUS.

"THERE are two worlds in history," says one of the finest writers of our time: "one beyond, the other on this side, the cross." The primeval world, old and decrepid at the time of Christ's regenerating mission, presented a strange spectacle for, the ridiculous went hand in hand with the horrible. The Arab and the Gaul, after having for ages retained the primitive idea of the unity of God, adored the acacia and the oak;* the Hindoo deified the Ganges, and sacrificed human victims to Sactis, goddess of death;† the Egyptian,—wise by excellence,—rendered devout worship to the garlic, the lotus, and nearly all bulbous plants;‡ the unknown tribes of young America adored the tiger, the vulture, the tempest, and the roaring cataract;§ finally, the Greeks and Romans confessedly filled their temples with demons,|| and those nations so intellectual, so polished, so prolific of great men, had deified vice under its most hideous aspects, and peopled their Olympus with robbers, adulterers, and murderers. Their morals corresponded with their creeds; corruption, descending like a vast river from the height of the seven imperial hills, overspread all the provinces. Judea, which had no

* The pagan Gauls of the sixth and seventh century deified oaks; they burned torches before those trees, and invoked them as though they could have heard them; the enormous stones which were found near, had their share of the divine honours. (*Histoire Ecclesiastique de Bretagne*, t. iv. seventh century.—*Capital. Caroli Magni*, lib. 1. tit. 64.)

† See *Tableau d'Inde* (Picture of India) by Buckingham.

‡ Juvenal's sarcasm is well known: *O sanctas gentes, quibus hæc nascuntur in hortis numina.* (Sat. xv. v. 10.)

§ Garcilasso, l. 1, c. 2 and 12.

|| Porphyry, who was so well acquainted with the sources of polytheism, admits that the devils were the objects of Gentile worship. "There are," says he, "unclean spirits, malicious and deceitful, who wish to pass for gods, and be adored by men; these must be appeased, as otherwise they might injure us. Some, being gay and playful, are propitiated by games and festivals; others, of a more gloomy turn, must have the smell of grease, and delight in bloody sacrifices."

more than the others escaped the contagion of vice, was falling with fearful rapidity; its religion no longer consisted in fundamental dogmas, but in a multitude of parasitical observances, and the dreams of its rabbins had taken the place of the Mosaic law.*

And what had become of haughty reason, amid all these deplorable aberrations—of reason, that queer of intelligences, who takes her own limited horizon for the bounds of the universe, and stretches gods on the bed of Procrustes? Where did she hold dominion? where had she hoisted her colours, whilst her ramparts were thus universally attacked? If she could, without foreign assistance, reconquer the earth which she had lost, why did she not do it? Alas! she felt that the torrent would sweep away her frail barriers; and, powerless to restrain it, she contented herself with noting its ravages. Resting on philosophy, she mourned over the lifeless remains of the social body, whose fall she could not prevent; Christianity came forward, and said to the dead body, "Arise and walk." And it was done according to her word.

From that day forward, a new race, cured of all diseases, cleansed from all impurity in the sacred laver, gathered around the cross which the Son of Mary had set up over the regenerate world, as the triumph of God over hell.

That glorious revolution which placed charity on the throne, attended by all the other virtues, that ever-memorable event which changed the aspect of the world, and whose results shall be felt till the end of all things, had its origin in Nazareth: from the hollow of that nameless rock flowed the humble stream of Christianity. "An obscure spring, an unnoticed drop of water, in which two sparrows could not drink, which one sunbeam might have dried up, and which now, like the great ocean of mind, has filled up all the depths

* It is a saying amongst the Jews, that the covenant was made with them on Mount Sinai, not founded on the written law, but on the oral law. They annihilate the former, to install the latter in its stead, and finally reduce all religion to tradition. This corruption was so prevalent amongst the Jews, even at the time of our Lord, that he reproaches them, in St. Mark, with having nullified the word of God by their traditions. But it is now much worse; they compare the sacred text to water, and the *Misnah*, or *Talmud*, to the best wine; again, the written law is salt, but the *Talmud* is pepper, cinnamon, &c.

of human wisdom, and bathed with its exhaustless waters, the past, the present and the future."*

Nothing is known of the means which brought about that grand fact which stands pre-eminent above all modern history. From the day of his manifestation in the temple, the Son of God led a hidden and meditative life with his mother and his adoptive father. This period, lost to the world, was undoubtedly that in which the Virgin spent her calmest and happiest days. It is not when human life rolls noisily on, like a wintry torrent, that it is the happiest; but when it resembles the streamlet gliding in silvery ripples through the flower-bespangled meadows. Mary, deprived of all the enjoyments of luxury and all the pleasures of affluence, but living near her Son, working for him, studying his tastes, seeing him every hour, offering to him, as it were, the first-fruits of his sacred harvest; the first, the humblest, and the most docile of his disciples, and bending her cultivated understanding before the divinity and superior mind of her Son—Mary must then have been a happy mother! If, at times, whilst Jesus was explaining to her the most profound meaning of the prophecies, he came on some passage which spoke of sufferings to be endured, a dark cloud gathered on the modest brow of the Virgin, it soon passed away, and that mild, benign countenance resumed its wonted serenity. The storm was still afar off, and their bark was moored in a quiet harbour. Her Son was there; she hung on his look, on his words, on his slightest gestures. And how she loved to serve that Son! how joyfully would she sit up all night to sew, or weave his working tunics, his festival robes, and that seamless garment, a masterpiece of art and skill, which was afterwards! *But as yet the Lord had only anointed His Son with the oil of gladness.* The companion of the Spouse, the wise Virgin of the Gospel, *left the morrow to provide for itself*, "and the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, dwelt in her heart and mind."

Jesus was perfection itself, the omniscient, the thrice holy, the mighty and the wise; as God, he could owe nothing to His crea-

* M. de Lamartine. *Voyage en Orient.*

tures, but as man he owed something to Mary. She it was who initiated him from his earliest childhood, in the humble virtues appertaining to humanity, and to her own simple and poetic tastes. That patient and unalterable meekness which he knew how to unite with the firmness of the prophet and the legislator; that merciful compassion which tempered the wrath of an angry God, and rendered Him—the model man, the just by excellence—the advocate of sinful man; that tenderness so kind, so simple, towards children whom he delighted in blessing and caressing during his divine mission; a thousand imperceptible shades, a thousand beams half absorbed in the blaze of light which constitutes the mortal life of Jesus Christ, all bear the seal of Mary.* Thus heaven is pleased to inhale the sweet scent of flowers, although the flowers are creatures of the earth.

We cannot doubt but that Jesus returned, with interest, all the Virgin's tenderness and solicitude; a woman so noble in blood and in heart was entitled to the respect of all, and especially of a Son for whose sake she had imposed on herself, in the early spring of life, so many privations, so much toil, and so many sacrifices. He who takes note in heaven of a glass of cold water given in his name, must assuredly be mindful of the obligations which he owed to Mary; and, if we see in the Gospel that he sometimes spoke to his divine mother less as her son than as her Lord, it is that at such times he detached himself from all earthly connections in order to promote the glory of his Father, whose interests were ever paramount with him. The Virgin knew too well the sacred mission of her son to be disturbed by this occasional severity; she calmly awaited the moment when the legislator should give place to the young Galilean whom her milk had nourished, and never had she to wait long: the human nature very soon granted what the divine nature had refused.

Jesus had just attained his twenty-ninth year when the angel of death summoned away the venerable head of the Holy Family.

* Nel vestire il Verbo d'umana carne non gli diede ella (la Vergine,) punto, o di potenza, o di santità, o di giustizia che egli (Gesù) già da sè solo non possedesse; ma gli diè molto bensì di misericordia. (P. Paolo Segneri, *Magnificat* spiegato.)

Joseph—that patriarchal man—whose submissive faith and simplicity of heart recalled the memory of Abraham and the era of the tent; Joseph, on whom the Holy Ghost himself bestowed the title of *just*; Joseph slept calmly in the Lord, in the sweet presence of his adopted son and his chaste spouse. Jesus and Mary mourned him, and kept their melancholy watch by his cold remains; the night wind only was heard to mingle in the lamentations of the poor family. The great ones of Galilee died not thus; their death was attended by more show and greater ostentation, though they had not, at the final moment, the glorious prospects of the carpenter of Nazareth.

The obsequies of the son of David were humble as his fortune, but Mary shed abundant tears over his funeral bed, and the Son of God was himself chief mourner. What emperor was ever so highly honoured?

At length, the time for preaching the Gospel began to approach, and He whom God ordained from all eternity to be its pontiff and apostle, quitted Nazareth to repair to the banks of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. That parting of the Blessed Virgin and her son must have been both solemn and affecting. The public life of Jesus was about to commence. Unfriended, poor, of humble origin, without other resource than his courage, his patience, and that gift of miracles which he never employed for his own personal advantage, he was going to confront an order of things *not strong enough to resist him, but strong enough to cause his death.** The Virgin could not help feeling an emotion of terror on seeing Jesus commit himself to that stormy sea—the Jewish world—on which so many illustrious prophets had perished. She knew the insurmountable pride of the Pharisees, the narrow and revengeful fanaticism of the Synagogue, the sanguinary whims of Herod Antipas; she also knew the Messianic oracles which spoke of suffering and ignominy! . . . The daughter of the kings of Juda, who was not of the race of the feeble, and who knew that her son was God, was none the less overcome by that first separation, which seemed the

* M. de Lamartine, book quoted

prelude and the image of one much more cruel. With a breaking heart she saw Jesus set out, and when the sound of his footsteps died away in the distance; when she found herself alone—all alone—in that house where she had passed so many happy hours with her son and her holy spouse, she hid her face between her hands, and remained long silent and motionless.

The absence of Christ was prolonged; the Virgin learned with profound admiration, but without surprise, the wonders of his baptism, when the Holy Trinity was, as it were, made palpable and revealed to men: the white dove extending its divine wings over the Saviour who was, at the same time, announced as the Son of God by a voice from heaven. Her maternal joy was, however, replaced by grievous apprehension when she heard that Jesus, almost immediately after his baptism, had plunged alone into the deep and perilous ravines of the lofty Mount *Quarantine*,* to prepare for the work of the world's redemption by fasting, prayer, and meditation. What must she suffer as she thought of Jesus wandering through a labyrinth of naked rocks, where the bird found not a particle of moss to make its nest, or a wild berry to maintain life—where all is rock and fire! What anguish when the tempest roared without! Where was Jesus? What was he doing, alone and unsheltered, on the high mountains of Jericho, whose steep pathways—full of rolling stones—wound amid frightful precipices.† Certain death awaited him if he missed his foot on the

* The desert wherein Jesus fasted forty days—whence it was called the desert of *Quarantine*—is situated in the mountains of Jericho, about a league from that city, and toward the western bank of the Jordan. Mount *Quarantine* is one of the highest on the northern side, presenting a profound chasm, hollowed out below, as though to prevent all access to the upper part; from west to north it displays a series of steep rocks, which open in many places, and contain caverns. The fourth part of the ascent is only gained by a precipitous slope, strewn with stones which roll from under the foot. When one has reached this fourth part of the mountain's height, he finds a very narrow pathway which conduces to a flight of steps surrounded by fearful precipices; this must be climbed at the most imminent risk, catching at certain stones which project here and there, and to which one is obliged to cling with feet and hands; if one of these stones chanced to give way, one would fall into a terrific chasm. (*Voyages de Jesus Christ*, 11ème voyage.)

† The sacred retreat wherein the Man-God spent forty days, is a natural grotto which is only to be gained by climbing a path cut in the rock. A niche has been

edge of an abyss; and no aid was near, if, during that fast—so complete, so long, so far beyond human strength—he fell fainting on the way! Those forty days were, to Mary, so many ages, maternal anxiety making every minute thus passed an eternity; but Jesus returned to Nazareth with his disciples, and his loved presence was, for Mary, like the balmy breath of spring, after the piercing frosts of winter.

Just then it was that the wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. The bride and bridegroom, who were relatives of the Blessed Virgin,* invited Mary, with Jesus and his disciples. All accepted the cordial invitation, and the Virgin—ever kind and obliging—undertook to assist in making preparations for the banquet, in which custom required a certain degree of splendour. But, the company was large, and the family poor; the bridegroom had been mistaken in his reckoning, and the wine-jars were almost empty, when our Lord—who would raise marriage to the rank of holy things, purifying it by his presence—entered the banquet-hall followed by Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathaniel, four young fishermen whom he had impressed with confidence in his genius and power. The wine ran out in the middle of the repast, and Mary, having first perceived it on a sign of distress from the hosts, turned to Jesus who was sitting near her, and said, pointedly, "They have no wine!"

Jesus answered her in a low voice, and with much emphasis, "Woman, what is it to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come!"†

made in one of its sides as if for an altar. Therein are seen some frescoes, almost effaced, representing angels. A thick wall closes up this species of chapel, which is lit by a window whence one cannot look down without a shudder. (*Ibid.*)

* The eastern tradition, which the Mahometans have received from the Christians, is, that St. John the Evangelist was the bridegroom at the wedding of Cana, and that, after having witnessed the miracle which Jesus wrought, he immediately quitted his wife to follow him. (D'Herbelot, *Biblioth. Orientale*, t. ii.)—Baronius, t. i., p. 106.—Mald. (*in Johan.*) also adopts this opinion, for which we cannot certify.

† Our Lord's reply to his blessed mother must have been in an under tone, as may even be inferred from the Gospel narrative. It is wholly impossible that Jesus Christ could have given his mother such an answer aloud; the guests, who were not in the secret, would have considered it extremely disrespectful towards her. It is clear that



The Virgin—anxious to save her friends a most painful humiliation—was yet not at all discouraged by these words; she knew that, if the hour of his manifestation were not come, Christ would anticipate it for her sake; and, with that faith which would remove mountains, she mildly said to the servants, "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye." Now there were there six water-pots of stone used for purifications; at the bidding of Jesus, these were filled to the brim with fresh water from a neighbouring spring, and that water was changed into delicious wine.

Thus it is that the Blessed Virgin had the first fruits of the miracles of her divine son, and that her intercession changed the very will of God.

The miracle of Cana was soon followed by a number of others which stamped with the seal of the Divinity the high and providential mission of the Saviour. At his voice, the storm was hushed, human infirmities disappeared, the devils were hurled back to their gloomy kingdom, corpses arose from their coffin, and, all over that spot of earth which his blessed footsteps marked, there was a great amelioration of both spiritual and corporeal suffering.* People came to him from Sidon, from Tyre, from Idumea, and from Arabia; and whole multitudes, gathering along his way, kissed the hem of his garments, and humbly asked him for health and life—things which only a God can give.

Mary, whom our Lord had not as yet thought proper to associate in his painful and wandering life—Mary heard these extraordinary tidings with great joy, not unmixed, however, with trouble and

the servants, hearing what the Blessed Virgin said, were ignorant of the Saviour's apparent refusal.

* A Mussulman poet has described, in graceful verse, the dominion which Jesus exercised over the diseases of the soul; the following is their substance:

"The heart of the afflicted man draws all its consolation from thy words."

"The soul recovers life and vigour by the mere hearing of thy name."

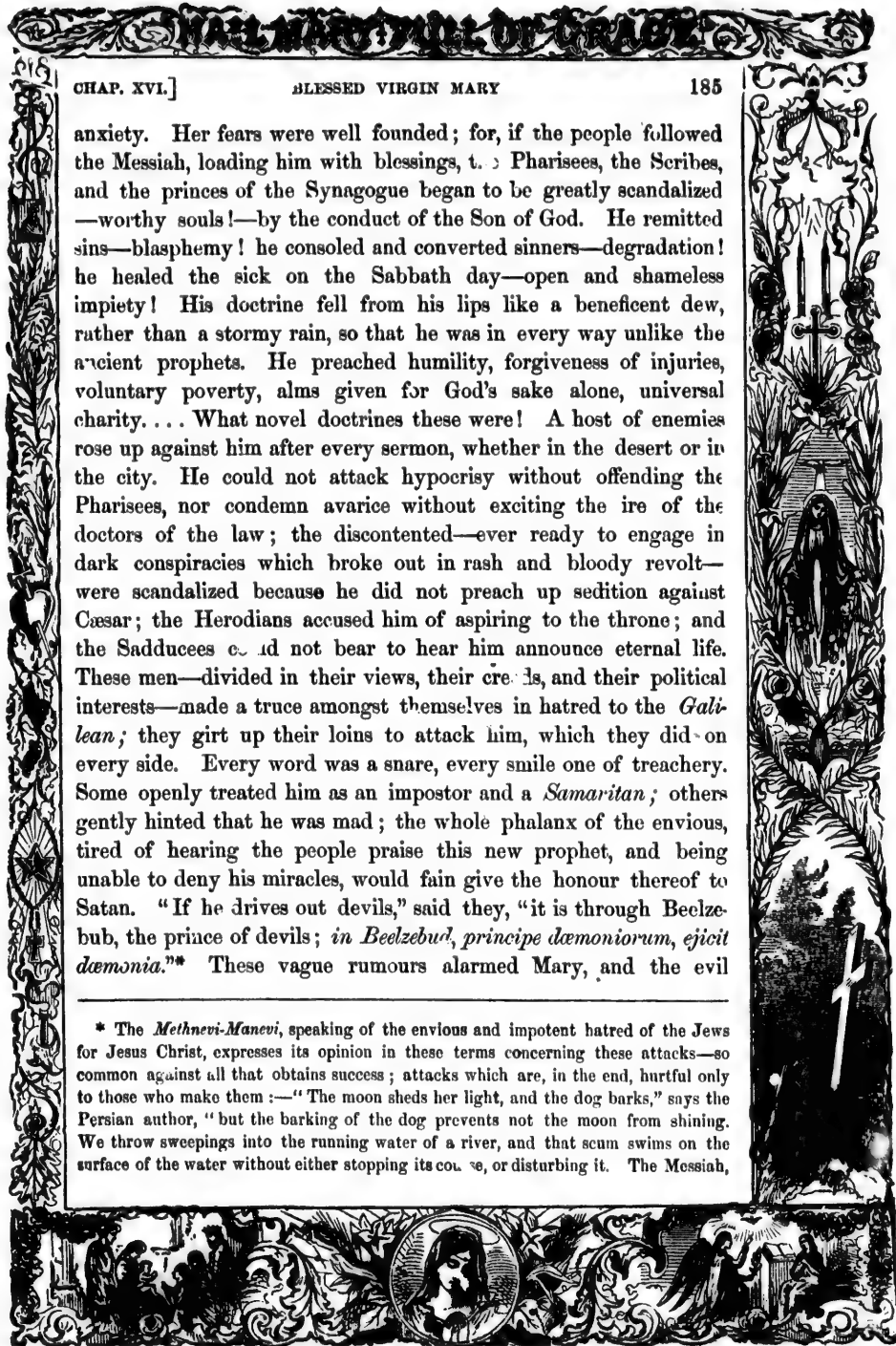
"If ever the mind of man can arise to the contemplation of the mysteries of the Deity,

"It is from thee that it obtains the lights whereby to discover them, and thee it is who givest it the attraction which leads it thereto."

"—A Christian," says the learned Orientalist, D'Herbelot, "could not express his ideas with greater force."

anxiety. Her fears were well founded; for, if the people followed the Messiah, loading him with blessings, the Pharisees, the Scribes, and the princes of the Synagogue began to be greatly scandalized—worthy souls!—by the conduct of the Son of God. He remitted sins—blasphemy! he consoled and converted sinners—degradation! he healed the sick on the Sabbath day—open and shameless impiety! His doctrine fell from his lips like a beneficent dew, rather than a stormy rain, so that he was in every way unlike the ancient prophets. He preached humility, forgiveness of injuries, voluntary poverty, alms given for God's sake alone, universal charity. . . . What novel doctrines these were! A host of enemies rose up against him after every sermon, whether in the desert or in the city. He could not attack hypocrisy without offending the Pharisees, nor condemn avarice without exciting the ire of the doctors of the law; the discontented—ever ready to engage in dark conspiracies which broke out in rash and bloody revolt—were scandalized because he did not preach up sedition against Cæsar; the Herodians accused him of aspiring to the throne; and the Sadducees could not bear to hear him announce eternal life. These men—divided in their views, their creeds, and their political interests—made a truce amongst themselves in hatred to the *Galilean*; they girt up their loins to attack him, which they did on every side. Every word was a snare, every smile one of treachery. Some openly treated him as an impostor and a *Samaritan*; others gently hinted that he was mad; the whole phalanx of the envious, tired of hearing the people praise this new prophet, and being unable to deny his miracles, would fain give the honour thereof to Satan. "If he drives out devils," said they, "it is through Beelzebub, the prince of devils; in *Beelzebub*, *principe demoniorum*, *ejicit demonia*."* These vague rumours alarmed Mary, and the evil

* The *Methnevi-Manevi*, speaking of the envious and impotent hatred of the Jews for Jesus Christ, expresses its opinion in these terms concerning these attacks—so common against all that obtains success; attacks which are, in the end, hurtful only to those who make them:—"The moon sheds her light, and the dog barks," says the Persian author, "but the barking of the dog prevents not the moon from shining. We throw sweepings into the running water of a river, and that scum swims on the surface of the water without either stopping its course, or disturbing it. The Messiah,



dispositions of her neighbours were calculated to do anything but reassure her. Of all the cities of Galilee, Nazareth was the most incredulous, and the most hardened against the divine word; and of all the families of Nazareth, that of Jesus was the least disposed, it seems, to accept him for the king-Messiah. As the divine maternity of Mary had never been revealed to her relatives, and the miracles which had been wrought during the Lord's infancy had taken place in distant countries, so they saw in the supposed son of Joseph only a young Israelite without learning, brought up amongst themselves, fed like them, more poorly lodged, more simply clad, and living from day to day by hard work, which brought him chiefly in contact with the lower classes. Christ, who would ennoble poverty by taking it for his portion, incurred the consequences of the position he had chosen. "Neither did his brethren," says St. John, "believe in him."* The report of the miracles which accompanied the preaching of the Gospel astonished, but could not convince, these obstinate Nazarenes. Knowing that Jesus was saluted all over Galilee, by the dangerous title of *Son of David*, and that crowds of two or three thousand persons gathered to hear him, they feared that these numerous assemblies might excite the suspicions of Herod Antipas, and that themselves might be brought into trouble on account of the young prophet. For this reason, they publicly gave out that Jesus was mad, and swore that they would bring him back to Nazareth in safe keeping. Concealing this family plot from Mary, they induced her to go with them to Caphernaum, in order that they might gain access to his presence by the authority of her name.†

The Messiah was teaching in the synagogue, in the midst of a silent and attentive audience, when the Nazarenes arrived. Ostentatiously displaying an authority which they were quite willing to magnify in the eyes of the crowd, as St. John Chrysostom

on the one side, raises the dead, and you see, on the other, the Jews devoured with envy, biting their nails, and tearing their hair." (Hussein-Vaëz.—D'Herbelot, *Biblioth. Orient.*)

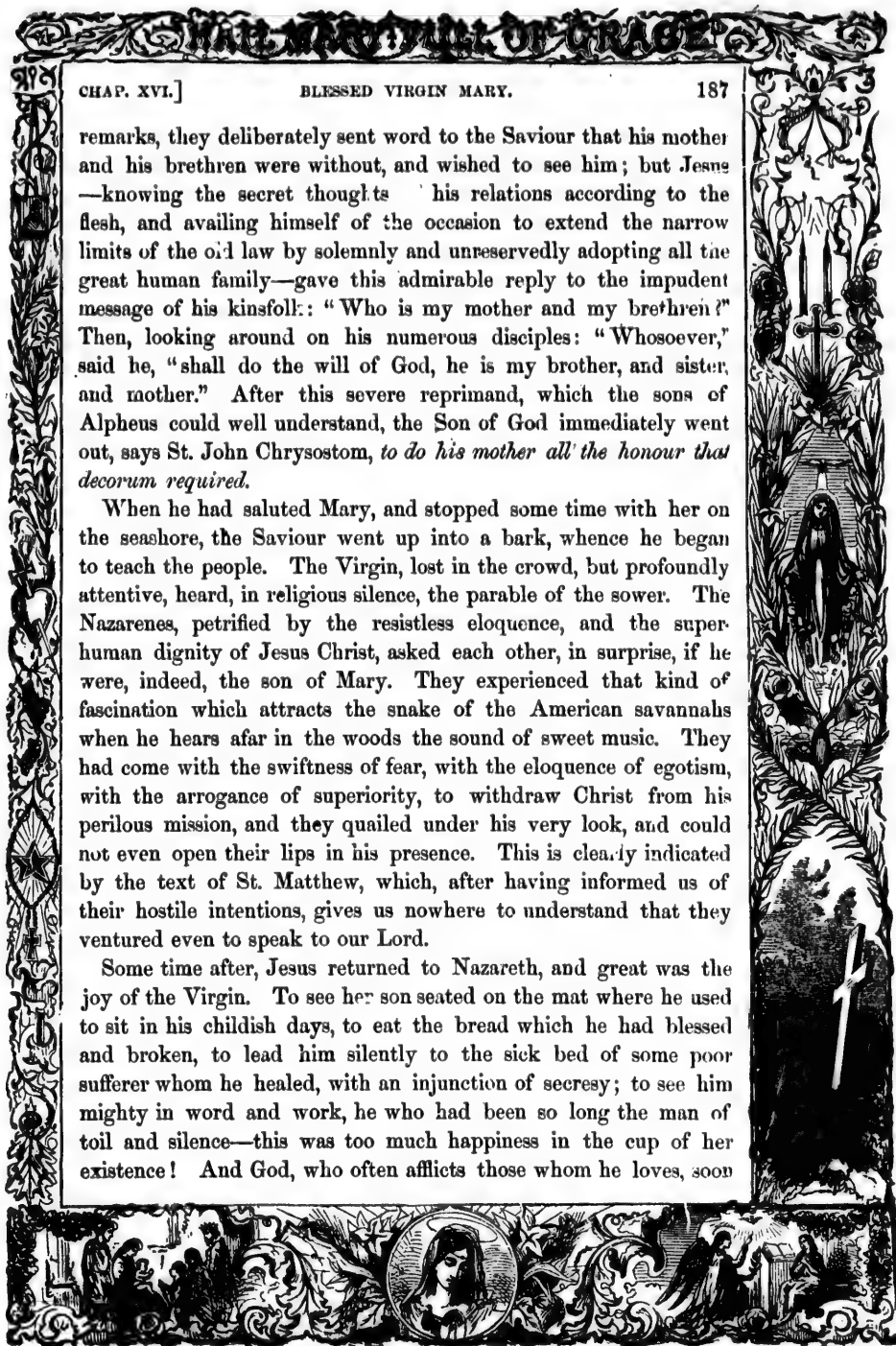
* St. John, ch. vii., v. 5.

† St. Mark, ch. iii., vs. 21, 31-35

remarks, they deliberately sent word to the Saviour that his mother and his brethren were without, and wished to see him; but Jesus—knowing the secret thoughts—his relations according to the flesh, and availing himself of the occasion to extend the narrow limits of the old law by solemnly and unreservedly adopting all the great human family—gave this admirable reply to the impudent message of his kinsfolk: “Who is my mother and my brethren?” Then, looking around on his numerous disciples: “Whosoever,” said he, “shall do the will of God, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.” After this severe reprimand, which the sons of Alphaeus could well understand, the Son of God immediately went out, says St. John Chrysostom, *to do his mother all the honour that decorum required.*

When he had saluted Mary, and stopped some time with her on the seashore, the Saviour went up into a bark, whence he began to teach the people. The Virgin, lost in the crowd, but profoundly attentive, heard, in religious silence, the parable of the sower. The Nazarenes, petrified by the resistless eloquence, and the super-human dignity of Jesus Christ, asked each other, in surprise, if he were, indeed, the son of Mary. They experienced that kind of fascination which attracts the snake of the American savannahs when he hears afar in the woods the sound of sweet music. They had come with the swiftness of fear, with the eloquence of egotism, with the arrogance of superiority, to withdraw Christ from his perilous mission, and they quailed under his very look, and could not even open their lips in his presence. This is clearly indicated by the text of St. Matthew, which, after having informed us of their hostile intentions, gives us nowhere to understand that they ventured even to speak to our Lord.

Some time after, Jesus returned to Nazareth, and great was the joy of the Virgin. To see her son seated on the mat where he used to sit in his childish days, to eat the bread which he had blessed and broken, to lead him silently to the sick bed of some poor sufferer whom he healed, with an injunction of secrecy; to see him mighty in word and work, he who had been so long the man of toil and silence—this was too much happiness in the cup of her existence! And God, who often afflicts those whom he loves, soon



mingled gall with its sweetness. On the Sabbath day, the son and mother went together to the synagogue. A great concourse of people had assembled there to see and hear Jesus; but the curiosity of the Nazarenes had not that character of confidence and respectful attention that Christ had so often met elsewhere. They were there, scandalized beforehand by what the son of Mary was to do and say, and admirably disposed to stone him if occasion offered.

There are countries decidedly hostile to all that does them honour, until the grass of the grave grows over the object of their envy.

Nevertheless, one of the ancients presented the Saviour of men with the book of the prophet Isaiah, and Jesus, unrolling the parchment, read this passage with simple grace and marvellous dignity: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me; he hath sent me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite of heart, and to preach a release to the captives, and deliverance to them that are shut up: to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Having closed the book, he sat down, and, speaking with that lively and natural eloquence which so strongly impressed his auditors, he made to himself the application of the Messianic oracle, and taught, not as a disciple of the synagogue, but as the very master of the synagogue. A low murmur ran through the assembly. Some were amazed at the force and the grace of his discourse; others, faithful to their system of contemptuous calumny, said aloud: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" And Jesus, penetrating their thoughts, and reading their false and envious hearts, spoke to them those words which have become proverbial: "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country and in his own house." Knowing that they intended to ask him for prodigies like unto those which he had wrought in Capharnaum, he told them plainly that their incredulity rendered them unworthy of any such, and that, in order to obtain miracles, they must be asked in simplicity and with faith. Thence, alluding to the propagation of his Gospel, and to that wild olive grafted on the ancient tree of the synagogue, symbolical of the call of the Gentiles: "In truth I say to you there were many widows, in the days of Elias, in Israel, when heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there was a great famine throughout all the earth. And to

none of them was Elias sent but to Sarepta of Sidon, to a widow woman. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian."

These last words were the drop of water which makes the cup overflow. Wounded in their national pride, in their hereditary hatred, in their traditional hopes, the assembly in the synagogue were filled with fury, and thirsted for blood. *They rose up tumultuously, and thrust him out of their city: and they brought him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.*

Seated amongst the humbler women, in a grated gallery, the Virgin had observed, with intense anxiety, the rise and progress of the storm. Reading the sinister projects of the Nazarenes in their fierce glances and furious gestures, she hesitated not to brave the danger in order to make her way to her son; but her strength was not equal to her courage. The Jews ran swiftly—they were always swift to shed blood—and Mary, trembling like a leaf, hardly able to support herself, walked slowly after them like one in a dream. She sees Jesus at the summit of a steep rock which overhangs a fearful precipice; she hears from afar the death-cry ringing; her knees bend under her; a mist gathers over her eyes; her voice dies away in a piteous moan; she falls like a flower stricken down by the wind, and lies prostrate on the ground.*

Meanwhile, the ferocious wolves in pursuit of the lamb, had been grievously disappointed; the hour of sacrifice was not yet come for the Son of man, and no one could take his life until he chose to give it up. Striking that murderous crowd with blindness,† Jesus

* Between the steep mountain whence the Jews intended to cast Jesus, and the city of Nazareth, "there is seen half-way," says Father Geramb, "the ruins of a monastery formerly inhabited by monks, and those of a very fine church built by St. Helena, and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, under the name of Our Lady of Terror. According to some, Mary was standing there when the Jews dragged her son along towards the summit of the mountain, to cast him thence. According to others, she had hastened thither, on hearing of the diabolical project in contemplation, but had arrived too late; overcome with terror, *she could go no farther.*"

† The most ancient heretics—preparing the way for modern rationalism, which

passed unseen through the midst of his enemies, and returned once more to Capharnaum, where he was soon after joined by his mother, Mary of Cleophas, and the sons of Alphaeus.

After having preached the Gospel in the country bordering on the fair lake of Tiberias, whose waves are radiant as the light, and having wrought the great miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes in the desert of Bethsaida, Jesus went up the Jordan again, with his disciples, to Cæsarea Philippi, the ancient Dan of Nephtali, (which name had just been changed by Philip, son of Herod,) visiting all the different towns and villages on his way.

It was, probably, at this period—for Euthymus,* who relates this traditional fact, leaves its date undecided—that the waters of the Jordan, already sanctified, beheld another affecting ceremony. Jesus, the Virgin, and the Apostles set out one morning at sunrise, for that sacred river “which flows through two lakes,” says Tacitus, “and empties itself into the third.”† Its banks were robed in a magnificent vegetation; islets, rising here and there from its bosom, sparkled amid its shining waves like baskets of verdure, fruit, and flowers; blue herons hovered over those flowery isles, where the wood-pigeon and the white turtle still hang their mossy nests on the branches of the wild pomegranate. The dew glittered on the green leaves of the willows like a shower of pale diamonds, and the rushes of the Jordan, which sometimes conceal tigers, were gently bending beneath the light breeze which shook the tops of the tall palm trees, with their clusters of coral-coloured dates. Far away, on the opposite shore, troops of gazelles were seen skipping around on the slopes of the gray, mottled mountains; and over the sandy plain flew some of the fierce children of the desert, mounted on

unwittingly dons their tattered rags—pretended that our Lord escaped through the illusion of a mist, *illudere per caliginem*. Tertullian strongly opposes this supposition. (*Adv. Marc.*, 4, 8.)

* According to St. Euthymus, our Lord baptized none but the Blessed Virgin and St. Peter, who afterwards baptized the other Apostles. “Some,” says this holy abbot, who flourished in Palestine in the fourth century, “Some have written that Jesus Christ himself baptized the Virgin and Peter.”

† *Nec Jordanes pelago accipitur: sed unum atque alterum lacum integer perfluit; tertio retinetur.* (*Taciti historiarum*, lib. v.)





ST. JORDAN.



coursers fleet as the wind, and armed with those long spears made of reeds from the banks of the Euphrates, which they used even in the first ages after the deluge, if we are to believe the Persian legends.* Clouds, of the richest violet hue, or of soft and tender rose-colour, floated like flowers in the deep blue sky, and the nightingale, that loves to sing in the lofty sycamores which overhang the sacred river of Palestine, was heard to warble its most melodious strains: Nature had donned her gala dress for the baptism of Mary.

The Virgin was clothed in white, according to the custom of the Hebrews when they figured alone in any religious ceremony, and she stood calm and collected by the side of her Saviour and her son; they both stepped into the river. Raising then, with his divine hand, the eastern veil worn by his chaste and beautiful mother, Jesus fixed his mild and penetrating eyes upon her with a glance of infinite tenderness; then, pouring on the Virgin's forehead the sacred water of regeneration, he baptized her in the name of the most Holy Trinity, HIMSELF one of the three divine persons.

It was then that the Blessed Virgin left off her solitary habits to follow her son in his journeys. She had ministered to him for thirty years both abroad and at home; she had worked for him, wept over him, suffered for him, and had worshipped him, without fail, evening and morning, even when he lay crying in his cradle, as we learn from Albertus Magnus. It was natural that, attaching herself to his persecuted lot, she should abandon the peaceful roof under which he was born, to follow his blessed footsteps whilst he evangelized the Hebrews. Amidst all the trials of that troubled life, the Virgin was admirable as ever. Loving Jesus more than ever mother loved her child, yet never did she intrude into his presence when, by so doing, she might interfere with the duties of his regenerating mission; never once did she speak to him of her fatigue, her fears, her melancholy forebodings, or her personal wants. Mary was not only a sacred dove hiding in the cleft of a rock;

* There grows on the banks of the Euphrates a certain kind of reed which almost equals the Indian bamboo. In early times, the Arabs and Assyrians made lances of them. (*Firdousi, Book of Kings.*)



MARY FULL OF GRACE

a pure virgin, called to nourish with her milk and to cradle in her arms a celestial guest; she was also a strong woman, whom the Lord was pleased to place by turns in every situation of life, in order to leave for the daughters of Eve an example to follow, and a model to imitate.

It was not proper that the Mother of God should follow Jesus and his Apostles alone through all Judea; hence Mary's retinue consisted of Mary of Cleophas, mother of James, Simon, Joseph and Jude, vulgarly called the brethren of the Lord; Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee, whom the Saviour loved more than the others; Susanna, wife of the tetrarch's steward, together with some wealthy women of Galilee who had given up all for Jesus. One of these, a Jewess, young, rich, well-born, and surpassingly beautiful, was the most tenderly attentive to the divine mother of *her Lord*. This woman—whose noble heart, storm-tossed like the waves of the Ægean sea, had burned with an unholy flame before the eyes of men, and braved public opinion with mockery and disdain—had come, penitent and submissive, to prostrate herself before Christ, and to ask of him, whom she acknowledged as God, a cure for the wounds of her soul. And the chaste love of the Lord had absorbed all the vain love, all the worldly attachments of Magdalen. She had trampled under foot her pearl necklaces, her jewels and chains of gold, and sold her castle by the lovely sea of Galilee; and now, without other ornament than a coarse brown garment, and those magnificent dark tresses wherewith she had dried the Lord's feet, the young patrician, rich in her alms, adorned with her new virtues, poured out her penitent tears in the pure and pitying bosom of Mary. The immaculate Virgin had received her with open arms, and having thus won her heart, she cultivated in that fertile, but long-neglected soil, the flowers which bloom for heaven.

After many and divers sufferings—many fears and apprehensions, which it were too tedious to enumerate—the Virgin entered Jerusalem, the fatal city, in the train of Jesus Christ, to celebrate the last pasch which the Lord made with his disciples. She saw the people of the royal city trooping out to meet the son of David, who came to them full of sweetness, mounted as the young princes of his race were wont to be, and graciously receiving the simple honours so



eagerly and so spontaneously offered by the multitude, thirsting for a sight of their prophet; for Jesus never rejected the humble testimonies of love and gratitude offered by his creatures. Trifling as were those pledges of grateful affection, they were yet received with divine goodness the moment they came from the heart.

Magdalen, by turns regarding *her Lord*, and that multitude of people who made the air resound with their *hosannas*, wept in silence behind her veil. Mary's eyes were likewise moist; but her gaze was turned towards the north-west, in the direction of Calvary



CHAPTER XVII.

MARY ON CALVARY.

THE palm branches cast by the Hebrews under the feet of their Messiah, were still lying green and fresh on the steep road to Bethany; the echoes of the valley of cedars* were still murmuring the expiring sounds of the glad, triumphant shouts wherewith the daughters of Sion had welcomed the *poor king*, when Jerusalem was again agitated by a new event of great and melancholy importance.

The chief priests, the senators, and the Pharisees, sought to get hold, even at a golden price, and without shrinking from domestic treachery, of a *great criminal*, who, they said, was endangering both religion and the state. Dangerous, indeed, must this man have been, since those *honourable* personages had imposed upon themselves an extraordinary fast in order to get possession of him,† and had even distributed certain alms through the city, by sound of trumpet, with the same intention. The Pharisees—those *conscientious* Jews who robbed only the uncircumcised, and who would have left their neighbour at the bottom of a well rather than draw him out on the Sabbath day, although they would have quickly taken out their ox or their ass—these had undertaken to spread amongst the people, who are so easily influenced one way or the other, ominous reports and vague rumours, which had produced a sort of feverish uneasiness that could only end in a violent outbreak. Things thus prepared, there was seen to descend, one evening, from Mount Moria, a well armed troop, accompanied by some senators, and commanded by the captain of the temple-guards;‡ after them

* *Valley of Cedars*, the ancient name of the valley of Josaphat.

† This anecdote is found in the *Toldos* published by Huldin, pp. 56 and 60.

‡ This office is known to the Gospel, which often speaks of these captains of the temple, who must be distinguished from the Roman officer who kept guard with his cohort around that sacred edifice to prevent the tumults and disorders which the multitude might cause. These captains of the temple were necessarily Jews, and





John J. Smith



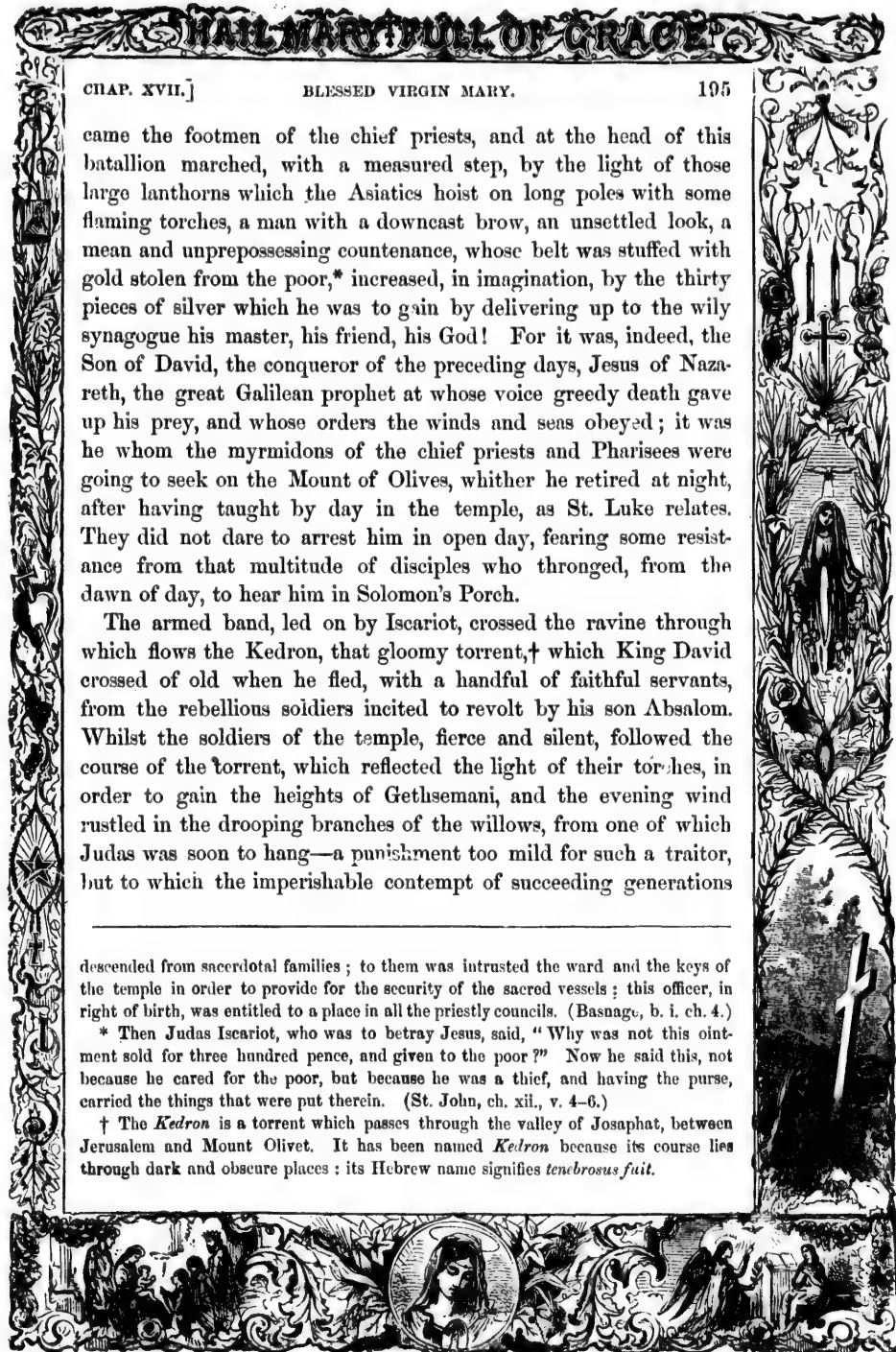
came the footmen of the chief priests, and at the head of this battalion marched, with a measured step, by the light of those large lanthorns which the Asiatics hoist on long poles with some flaming torches, a man with a downcast brow, an unsettled look, a mean and unprepossessing countenance, whose belt was stuffed with gold stolen from the poor,* increased, in imagination, by the thirty pieces of silver which he was to gain by delivering up to the wily synagogue his master, his friend, his God! For it was, indeed, the Son of David, the conqueror of the preceding days, Jesus of Nazareth, the great Galilean prophet at whose voice greedy death gave up his prey, and whose orders the winds and seas obeyed; it was he whom the myrmidons of the chief priests and Pharisees were going to seek on the Mount of Olives, whither he retired at night, after having taught by day in the temple, as St. Luke relates. They did not dare to arrest him in open day, fearing some resistance from that multitude of disciples who thronged, from the dawn of day, to hear him in Solomon's Porch.

The armed band, led on by Iscariot, crossed the ravine through which flows the Kedron, that gloomy torrent,† which King David crossed of old when he fled, with a handful of faithful servants, from the rebellious soldiers incited to revolt by his son Absalom. Whilst the soldiers of the temple, fierce and silent, followed the course of the torrent, which reflected the light of their torches, in order to gain the heights of Gethsemani, and the evening wind rustled in the drooping branches of the willows, from one of which Judas was soon to hang—a punishment too mild for such a traitor, but to which the imperishable contempt of succeeding generations

descended from sacerdotal families; to them was intrusted the ward and the keys of the temple in order to provide for the security of the sacred vessels: this officer, in right of birth, was entitled to a place in all the priestly councils. (Basnage, b. i. ch. 4.)

* Then Judas Iscariot, who was to betray Jesus, said, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" Now he said this, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having the purse, carried the things that were put therein. (St. John, ch. xii., v. 4-6.)

† The *Kedron* is a torrent which passes through the valley of Josaphat, between Jerusalem and Mount Olivet. It has been named *Kedron* because its course lies through dark and obscure places: its Hebrew name signifies *tenebrosus fuit*.



continually adds—a sad and solemn scene was passing in that same garden of Olives where the unworthy Apostle was going to seek his Master, to destroy him.

After having prayed a long time, prostrate on the ground, in that fearful agony which bedewed his divine brow with a bloody sweat, Christ arose in submissive resignation to the terrible will of his Father, and ready to drain the bitter chalice even to the dregs. He raised his large soft eyes to the midnight heavens, studded with brilliant constellations, and illumined by the meridian moon, that fair lamp of the firmament, whose useful light the children of Abraham bless in their prayers;* she was then at her full, and cast a sheet of radiant light over that austere landscape whose dark mountains, rising one above the other, were traced on the clear blue of the sky. Jerusalem, half hid in shade, and in some places brilliantly lit up by the moon's rays, sent afar an aromatic odour from the rare plants of its gardens, and its groves of palm trees rose stately and grand, interspersed with towers of white marble. Silence reigned amid the mountains, but a low murmur arose from the depth of the valley, and Jesus shuddered. "It is they!" he said within himself, and he walked slowly towards the spot where he had left the three Apostles whom he had chosen to share his lonely watch. Alas! either fatigue, or the drowsy murmur of the wind through the pale olive branches, had gradually overcome those careless sentinels. Jesus stood looking on them a moment with holy bitterness; he had told them that his death was near at hand, that the hour of danger had arrived, and yet they slept—they, his kinsmen, his friends, his chosen disciples—apparently indifferent to his danger

* The day of the new moon is a festival day for the Hebrews; the women abstain from work, and the devotees fast on the previous day. After reciting a number of prayers in the synagogue, they keep the remainder of the day as a joyous festival. Three days after, the Jews assemble on a platform, and fixing their eyes steadfastly on the moon, they bless God in a long prayer for having created, and also for renewing her, to teach the Israelites that they ought to become new creatures: *O moon! blessed be thy Creator, blessed be he who made thee*; and then they jump three times as high as they can, saying to the moon: *Even as we leap towards thee, but cannot reach thee, so may our enemies rise against us without power to harm us!* . . . (Basmage, l. vii., ch. 16.)

and death. . . . O vanity of favours, of the ties of blood and friendship! They could keep awake on Thabor at the time of the glorious transfiguration, but they slept in the hour of trial and misfortune!

A confused noise was heard on the hollow road leading to the little village of Gethsemani, and soon after the light of many torches flashed on the trees. Jesus then, bending over his sleeping Apostles, said in a low, deep voice, "Arise! he who is to betray me is near at hand!" He had scarcely spoken these words when Judas and his band arrived. Advancing to Jesus, audacity in his eyes, and the false smile on his lips, he pointed him out to the hostile troop who came to seek him, giving him, at the same time, that sacrilegious kiss which has since taken his name. This was the signal. Jesus received the traitor kindly, and said to him, with touching sweetness, "Friend, whereto art thou come?"

Whereto was he come! He was come to earn the thirty pieces of silver promised by the synagogue. Cupidity—a cold and calculating passion—commits tenfold more crimes, and crimes of a darker dye, than violence.

Judas had not time to answer this embarrassing question, for all the others, advancing, threw themselves on Jesus and laid hold of him. Then arose the hot blood of Peter ben Cephas,* Prince of the Apostles; he drew his sword and smote one of the servants of the high priest; but Jesus, arresting the only arm that was raised in his defence, commanded the sword to be restored to its scabbard. "That the Scriptures may be fulfilled," said the sacred victim, "so it must be done." The Lamb of God was willing to be immolated for the sins of the world.

Thereupon, there was heard within the garden, a confused sound of hasty footsteps, of breaking branches, and cries of terror; and men were suddenly seen scaling the low fence† which surrounded the garden: these were the disciples making their escape!

* *Peter ben Cephas*, (Peter son of Peter.) This is the name by which the prince of the Apostles is known in the East.

† The garden of Gethsemani or Olives, at the foot of the mountain of that name, is surrounded by a wall about three feet high; it is two hundred paces long by one hun-



The hostile troop, after having bound Jesus like a criminal, retraced their steps to the holy city, bending their course towards the stone bridge which the Asmonean princes had thrown over the Kedron; but the people of Jerusalem, coming in crowds, had it already occupied, and tradition relates that Jesus was dragged across the stream; whereby the prophecy was literally fulfilled, "He shall drink in the way the water of the torrent." The holy marks of the Saviour's feet and of one of his knees are imprinted in the bed and on the stone margin of the brook; so, at least, say the Christians of Jerusalem, who still point them out. Having climbed the hill of Sion, they entered Jerusalem by the Sterquilian gate, and repaired to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the ancients were assembled. The chief priests and the scribes then demanded of Jesus whether he was the CHRIST. "If I tell you," replied the Saviour mildly, "you will not believe me." "Art thou the Son of God?" demanded Caiaphas. "Thou hast said it," answered Jesus, "I am." "He has blasphemed!" cried the high-priest, rending his garments. "He has deserved death," said the Scribes and Pharisees.

Then they spat upon his face, struck him with their fists, and marched him to and fro, crying out in bitter mockery: "Prophecy unto us, O Christ! and tell us who it was that struck thee!"

Meanwhile, Peter, who had sworn rather to die than to abandon him, denied him three times in the court-yard of the high-priest!

Next day, the chief priests and the Pharisees dragged Jesus before Pontius Pilate, who was exceedingly unpopular with them since the affair of the imperial ensigns which he had introduced by night into Jerusalem;* but as they hated the Son of God still more, and that the Romans alone could condemn him to death,† they submitted to

dred and forty wide. It contains a rock, forming a reddish grotto, where it is said that the three Apostles slept. (*Voyages de Jesus Christ, 44th voyage.*)—Its name of Gethsemani is derived from the richness of its soil: Gethsemani, in Hebrew, signifies fertile valley.

* Josephus, *Ant. Jud.*, b. xviii., ch. 4.

† Before Judea had fallen under the Roman domination, the Sanhedrim had the power of life and death; but the conquerors took that privilege to themselves. It was the custom of the Romans to leave vanquished nations their temples and their gods; but in civil matters they obliged them to follow the laws and ordinances of the



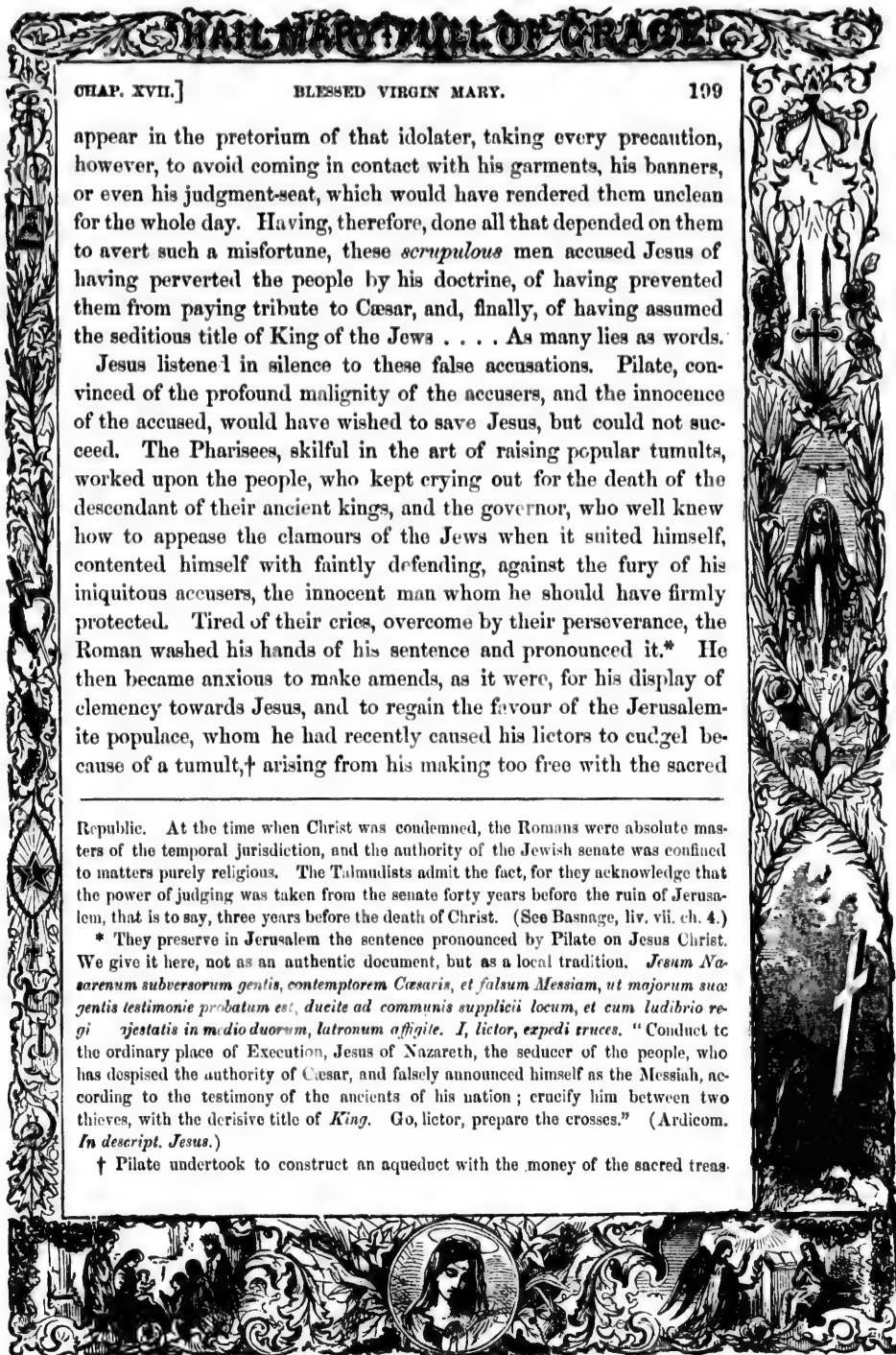
appear in the pretorium of that idolater, taking every precaution, however, to avoid coming in contact with his garments, his banners, or even his judgment-seat, which would have rendered them unclean for the whole day. Having, therefore, done all that depended on them to avert such a misfortune, these *scrupulous* men accused Jesus of having perverted the people by his doctrine, of having prevented them from paying tribute to Cæsar, and, finally, of having assumed the seditious title of King of the Jews . . . As many lies as words.

Jesus listened in silence to these false accusations. Pilate, convinced of the profound malignity of the accusers, and the innocence of the accused, would have wished to save Jesus, but could not succeed. The Pharisees, skilful in the art of raising popular tumults, worked upon the people, who kept crying out for the death of the descendant of their ancient kings, and the governor, who well knew how to appease the clamours of the Jews when it suited himself, contented himself with faintly defending, against the fury of his iniquitous accusers, the innocent man whom he should have firmly protected. Tired of their cries, overcome by their perseverance, the Roman washed his hands of his sentence and pronounced it.* He then became anxious to make amends, as it were, for his display of clemency towards Jesus, and to regain the favour of the Jerusalemite populace, whom he had recently caused his lictors to cudgel because of a tumult,† arising from his making too free with the sacred

Republic. At the time when Christ was condemned, the Romans were absolute masters of the temporal jurisdiction, and the authority of the Jewish senate was confined to matters purely religious. The Talmudists admit the fact, for they acknowledge that the power of judging was taken from the senate forty years before the ruin of Jerusalem, that is to say, three years before the death of Christ. (See Basnage, liv. vii. ch. 4.)

* They preserve in Jerusalem the sentence pronounced by Pilate on Jesus Christ. We give it here, not as an authentic document, but as a local tradition. *Jesum Nazarenum subversorum gentis, contemptorem Cæsaris, et falsum Messiam, ut majorum suæ gentis testimonio probatum est, ducite ad communis supplicii locum, et cum ludibrio regi nectatis in medio duorum, latronum affigite. I, lictor, expedi cruces.* "Conduct to the ordinary place of Execution, Jesus of Nazareth, the seducer of the people, who has despised the authority of Cæsar, and falsely announced himself as the Messiah, according to the testimony of the ancients of his nation; crucify him between two thieves, with the derisive title of *King*. Go, lictor, prepare the crosses." (Ardicom. *In descript. Jesus.*)

† Pilate undertook to construct an aqueduct with the money of the sacred treas-



treasury, under pretence of constructing an aqueduct with which he had nothing to do,—so he ordered the son of David and of Solomon to be scourged, amid the acclamations of the deicide people, who had dared to take upon their own heads and those of their children, the dread responsibility of his death. That done, he delivered him up, though regarding him with pity and with admiration,* to the taunts and insults of a soldiery whom the princes of the Synagogue, despite their hatred of them, had stooped to bribe, in order to secure their co-operation in the execution of their revengeful projects.† They well knew how to hate—those *zealots* of the law of Moses, who would kill and mock the CHRIST, for God's sake!

When Jesus had reached the court of the pretorium, they seated him on a fallen pillar,‡ and the entire cohort amused themselves by

ury, to bring water into Jerusalem from a distance of two hundred stadia. The people, violently excited against the Roman governor, whose real intention they penetrated, assembled by thousands in the streets and public places of Jerusalem; the whole city resounded with execrations against Pilate, "and some even provoked the governor," says Josephus, "by violent abuse, as is usual in popular outbreaks." Pilate, who was not so easily intimidated, ordered his men to take large sticks under their garments and surround the mob; when the latter, after a short respite, began again with their clamours and outcries, Pilate made a sign to his soldiers, who instantly fell on the people, and even went beyond their instructions, beating those who said nothing as well as those who were loudest in the clamour. "Those poor people having no arms," adds Josephus, with compassionate sympathy for the Jewish rioters, "were therefore inhumanly treated; some were killed, others wounded, and thus the tumult was quelled." (Joseph. *Ant. Jud.*, l. xviii. ch. 4.)

* Tiberias, acting on the report sent by Pilate, proposed to the senate to deify Jesus. Tertullian mentions this as a notorious fact in his *Apology*, which he presented to the senate in the name of the church, and he would not have weakened so good a cause by making any statement that could not be verified. (Tert. *Apol.* 5.)

† Salvador would fain exculpate his co-religionists by casting on the Roman soldiers the odium of the treatment inflicted on Jesus in the pretorium; but it is clear that the Romans only acted as they did on the instigation of the enemies of Christ. The following is the opinion of St. John Chrysostom on this subject. "It was, in reality, the Jews themselves who condemned Jesus to death, although they attribute the act to Pilate. *They would that his blood should fall on themselves and their children.* It was they alone who offered him all the insults that he received, who tied him, led him to Pilate, and had him so cruelly treated by the soldiers. Pilate had ordered nothing of all this. (Sermon 77, in *Matth.*)

‡ This pillar, of gray marble, and not more than two feet high, is in Rome, in the Church of St. Praxeda.





offering him every imaginable species of insult. It was the season when the dangerous *rhannus** was in full bloom—that bush in whose green thorny mass the symbolical ram of Abraham's sacrifice† was, of old, entangled; one of the soldiers ran out and gathered a branch to form a derisive crown for Christ; the fresh blossoms were soon stained with his sacred blood, every thorn making a deep and insupportable wound. Having stripped him perfectly naked, they threw over his shoulders a purple rag, placed a reed in his hand by way of sceptre, and, with irony and mocking genuflexions, they saluted him as king. His whole body was but one gaping wound, for the sharp, pointed lashes mangled the flesh, and sent it flying in pieces through the hall; his sacred face was covered with spittle, and the blood which flowed from his divine brow, which his chained hands could not wipe away! . . . Pity was considered as a degrading weakness‡ by the chief priests, the Pharisees, and the doctors of the law—those high and *honourable* men.

When the Pharisees thought that the idolatrous soldiers had sufficiently degraded Jesus in the eyes of the people to destroy the idea of his divinity, the approach of the Sabbath rendering expedition necessary, they took their victim, whom the Roman procurator reluctantly gave up, and, after placing the enormous cross on his bleeding and mangled shoulders, they spurred him on with the shafts of their lances in his slow and painful journey to Calvary, where they were to crucify him.

The streets were thickly lined with the multitude of spectators, some displayed a ferocious joy, and loudly anathematized the son of David; others deplored the hard fate of that young prophet who

* The detached thorns of this crown, which are still preserved, are now recognised for the *rhannus spina Christi* of Linnæus.

† St. Jerome (*in Philem.*) says that the ram which Abraham saw entangled in the bush was the figure of Jesus crowned with thorns.

‡ Basn., l. vi., ch. 17.—The punishment of scourging was very ancient amongst the Jews, and was not considered infamous. According to the Talmud, kings themselves were punished in this way on certain occasions. "Tradition teaches," says Maimonides, "that the king must not have more than eighteen wives; if he marries one above that number, he is to be scourged. If he have more horses than his chariot requires, let him be scourged. If he amass more gold or silver than is required to pay his ministers, let him be scourged." (Maimon., *Halach.*, *Molach.*, ch. 3.)



had done naught but good to men, by whom he was now abandoned and betrayed. But those barren proofs of sympathy were scarcely perceptible; the good wept in silence; those whom he had fed with five loaves in the desert, those whom he had cured, those whom he had loved, were there, lost in the crowd, and no voice was raised to protest against his execution;* the Apostles whom he had most loved had disowned him! the others had fled, with one single exception!

As he painfully toiled down the long street which leads to the Gate of Judgment, a woman made her way through the crowd; she was very fair, and her mild, sweet face wore the stamp of purity, but it was full of unutterable sorrow; she was pale as death, and trembled in every limb; her eyes, which could now weep no more, fell with a glance of such mortal anguish on the gaping wounds of the Saviour, that the daughters of Jerusalem wept as they saw her murmuring, "Poor, poor mother!" She silently glided through the people, who made way for her through an instinct of sympathy and compassion. Some hardened Pharisees were loading Jesus with bitter taunts and reproaches—he who was bathed in sweat, and almost expiring under the weight of the Cross; but his mother heard them not: the foreign soldiers who surrounded her Son, made threatening gestures at her; she saw them not. But when a number of spears, pointed against her bosom, arose between her and Jesus, all the fire of the blood of David sparkled in her eyes, and she raised her beautiful head with an air of such majestic sorrow, such utter contempt of death, that the astonished soldiers slowly lowered their arms before that holy and heroic woman. Fierce as their martial life had made them, they still remembered their mothers.

Mary turned her trembling steps toward the Saviour; she fixed

* We read in the Misnah that, in the days when the Jews were governed by their own laws, when a criminal was led to the place of execution, a herald went before him on horseback, crying, "Such a one is condemned for such a crime; if any one has anything to say in his defence, let him speak." If any one came forward, the criminal was brought back, and the reasons advanced in his favour were examined by two judges who walked beside him; the prisoner might be thus brought back as often as five times. (Misnah, Tract. de Syned, ch. vi., p. 233.) Jesus Christ being condemned by the Roman laws, could not profit by this national custom.

her sorrowful eyes on that humbled form moving slowly along, bleeding and half naked, under a heavy load; on that imposing countenance, so mild and merciful, which she had scarcely ever dared to touch with her chaste lips, and which now, swollen and discoloured, covered with blood and spittle, scarce retained the image of the Creator. She passed her hand sadly over her brow as though to assure herself that the whole was not a fearful dream. No groan relieved her oppressed heart, no gesture of despair betrayed the secret of her agony; it only seemed that she was going to die, and die she must, in fact, a thousand times over, during that solemn and heart-rending pause, if *He who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb* had not divinely sustained her. Jesus soon perceived the presence of that mute and motionless figure, and bending still lower his already bowed head, he pronounced the name of mother. At that word, which fell on the Virgin's ear like a funeral knell, a thrill of anguish ran through her heart; she was seen to totter, and grow pale; then, sinking beneath the accumulated load of sorrow, she fell prostrate on those rough stones already marked with the blood of Jesus.* . . .

A young Galilean, with a gloomy, dejected countenance, and a young woman bathed in tears, quickly made their way to where Mary lay; thanks to their tender solicitude, the sorrowful Virgin recovered her senses, together with the consciousness of that physical and moral martyrdom which none, according to the Fathers, ever equalled. Doubtless, John and Magdalen did all they could to keep her away from the bloody scene about to be enacted on the

* Tradition, supported by the authority of St. Boniface and St. Anselm, relates that Jesus saluted his mother with the words: "Hail, mother!" As the blessed Virgin is known to have been at the foot of the Cross, there is nothing improbable in this tradition of the Fathers. "There is nothing contrary to faith in these traditions," says M. de Chateaubriand; "they serve to show how the marvellous and sublime history of the Passion was engraved on the minds of men. Eighteen centuries have rolled away; endless persecutions and numberless revolutions fail either to hide or efface the trace of a mother mourning for her son." There was built, in memory of Our Lady's swoon, a church which was consecrated under the name of Our Lady of the Spasm. "It was there," says M. de Geramb, "that Mary, repulsed by the soldiers, met her Son bending under the weight of the ignominious wood on which he was to die."

Golgotha; but their efforts were vain, for, raising herself with difficulty, Mary began to climb, under a burning sun, the steepest side of Calvary, which, being the shortest way, was that which they had made Jesus take.*

They had reached the fatal and sacred place where the Lamb of God was to satisfy the justice of offended Heaven, substituting Himself for all victims, and taking upon him all our miseries. It was there that he was to offer up that great sacrifice, the efficacy of which goes back, on the one side, to the original transgression, and extends, on the other, through the night of futurity even to the consummation of the world. That little rocky esplanade was the altar whereon the blood of Christ was to flow in waves to wash away the sins of the world, and annihilate for ever the compact of perdition which made us over at our birth to the Enemy of Souls. But what had become of the sacred victim? Where had his executioners hid him from the desolate eyes of his mother? Mary cast an anxious glance over the dreary mountain; she saw the expecting multitude, the crosses laid on the ground, labourers carelessly digging out the deep holes which were to receive the three instruments of torture. . . . But where was Jesus?

He appeared, but in what a condition! stripped of his garments, without a rag to cover his lacerated flesh and his bleeding wounds—he, so chaste and so pure! His executioners, ignominiously dragging him along, exposed him thus for some time to the ridicule of the people; then, the Just One stretched himself on the Cross, that bed of honour prepared for him by the gratitude of men in return for his immense love! It was a sight too horrible for those who loved him; Mary was taken some paces thence, to a species of natural grotto, where she remained standing, white and cold as marble.† There was heard without a humming noise like that

* This road, which formerly led to Calvary, and by which the Saviour passed, now exists no longer; it is covered with houses, in the midst of which is seen a large pillar, pointing out the ninth station; Turkish fanaticism has done all it could to make the place disagreeable, by heaping dung around it so as to disgust the Christians. (De Geramb, t. 1er, p. 363.)

† Near the spot where our Saviour was nailed to the Cross, there is a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows. It was to this place that the Virgin retired during the doleful preparations for her Son's execution. (De Geramb, t. 1er, p. 151.)



HAIL MARY FULL OF GRACE

CHAP. XVII.]

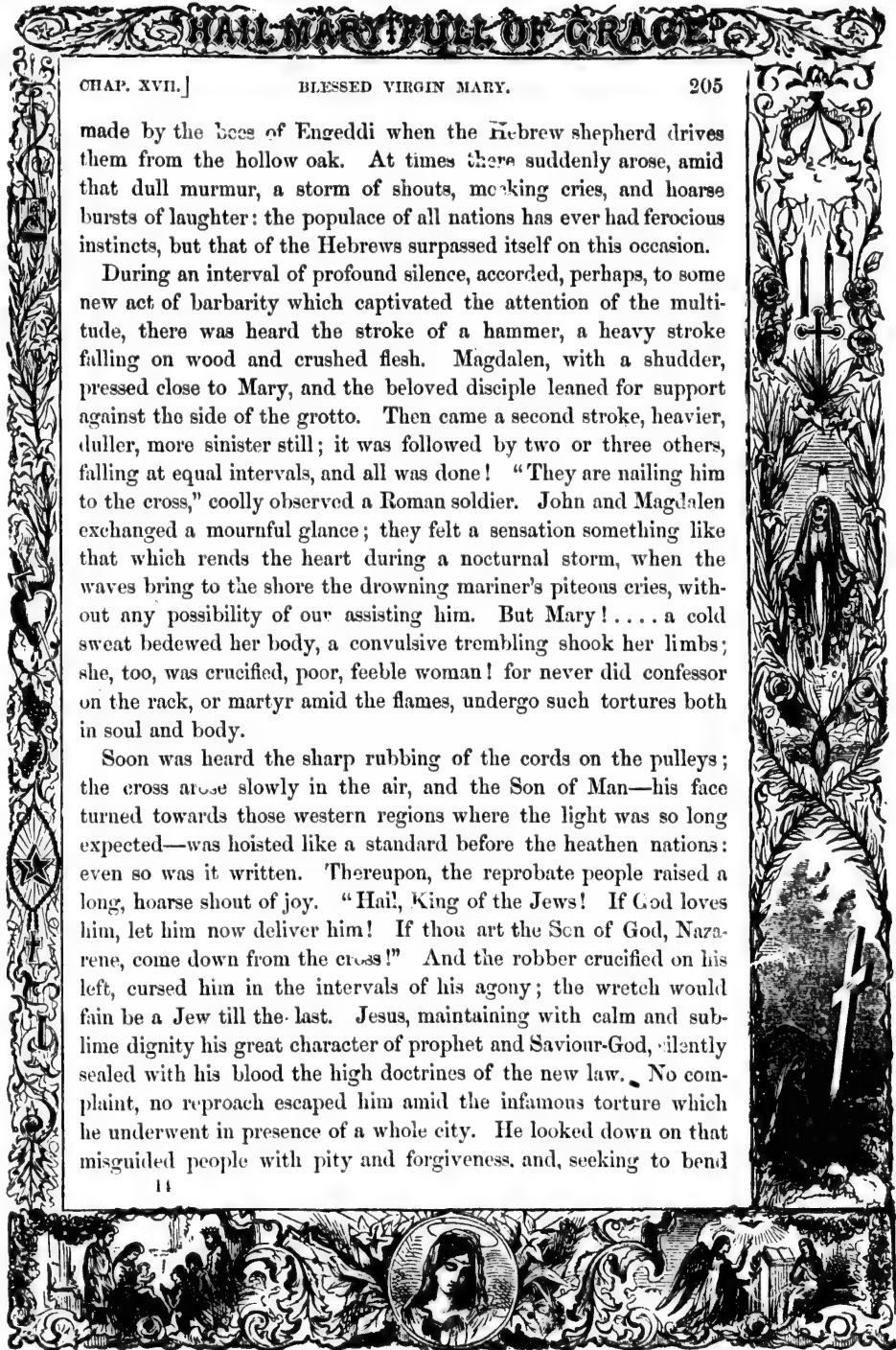
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

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made by the bees of Engeddi when the Hebrew shepherd drives them from the hollow oak. At times there suddenly arose, amid that dull murmur, a storm of shouts, mocking cries, and hoarse bursts of laughter: the populace of all nations has ever had ferocious instincts, but that of the Hebrews surpassed itself on this occasion.

During an interval of profound silence, accorded, perhaps, to some new act of barbarity which captivated the attention of the multitude, there was heard the stroke of a hammer, a heavy stroke falling on wood and crushed flesh. Magdalen, with a shudder, pressed close to Mary, and the beloved disciple leaned for support against the side of the grotto. Then came a second stroke, heavier, duller, more sinister still; it was followed by two or three others, falling at equal intervals, and all was done! "They are nailing him to the cross," coolly observed a Roman soldier. John and Magdalen exchanged a mournful glance; they felt a sensation something like that which rends the heart during a nocturnal storm, when the waves bring to the shore the drowning mariner's piteous cries, without any possibility of our assisting him. But Mary! . . . a cold sweat bedewed her body, a convulsive trembling shook her limbs; she, too, was crucified, poor, feeble woman! for never did confessor on the rack, or martyr amid the flames, undergo such tortures both in soul and body.

Soon was heard the sharp rubbing of the cords on the pulleys; the cross arose slowly in the air, and the Son of Man—his face turned towards those western regions where the light was so long expected—was hoisted like a standard before the heathen nations: even so was it written. Thereupon, the reprobate people raised a long, hoarse shout of joy. "Hail, King of the Jews! If God loves him, let him now deliver him! If thou art the Son of God, Nazarene, come down from the cross!" And the robber crucified on his left, cursed him in the intervals of his agony; the wretch would fain be a Jew till the last. Jesus, maintaining with calm and sublime dignity his great character of prophet and Saviour-God, silently sealed with his blood the high doctrines of the new law. No complaint, no reproach escaped him amid the infamous torture which he underwent in presence of a whole city. He looked down on that misguided people with pity and forgiveness, and, seeking to bend



the divine justice in favour of those who crucified him, "*Father,*" said he, with his dying voice, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*"

"And yet for eighteen centuries the Father has *not* forgiven them, and they drag their punishment all over the earth, and every where the very slave has to humble himself to look at them."*

The Virgin left the temporary asylum where she had taken shelter, and walked, with her head bowed down, towards the place of execution. At some paces from the infamous tree, rude soldiers were casting lots for the seamless robe which her own hands had spun,† and clamorously contending for the sacred garments which had wrought so many miracles.‡ A slight convulsion passed over Mary's features; she thought of the time when, rich only in the love of Jesus, but free from immediate anxiety, she worked, in the evenings, by his side, fabricating that festal robe; now, the remembrance was torture to her heart, for the light which gilded her past days of happiness did but darken the gloom of her present sorrow. She raised her eyes to heaven, seeking there, as usual, the strength to endure, and her eye met that of the crucified God. At that fearful sight, her feet were rooted to the earth, and she stood so petrified with horror that all she had hitherto suffered seemed no more than a dream, a half-effaced vision: all was absorbed in the Cross.§

Jesus, casting on the Virgin a sweet and mysterious look, seemed to say to her, as he did on the preceding evening to his Apostles: "*Mother, the hour is come!*"

And what hour was that?

It was the most memorable and eventful hour ever marked by

* M. de Lamennais

† It is an ancient tradition that the Virgin herself wove her Son's tunic.

‡ The cathedral of Trèves possesses one of these sacred garments, and at one of its recent annual expositions, the police reports announced the presence of twenty-five thousand pilgrims in that city.

§ The Fathers and the great doctors of the Church place the sufferings of the Virgin on Calvary above those of all the martyrs. *Virgo universos martyres tantum excedit quantum sol ad reliqua astra*, says St. Basil; and St. Anselm adds, *Quidquid crudelitatis inflictum est corporibus martyrum leve fuit aut potius nihil comparatione tue passionis.* (*De Ex. Virg.*, cap. 5.)



HAIL MARY! FULL OF GRACE!

CHAP. XVII.]

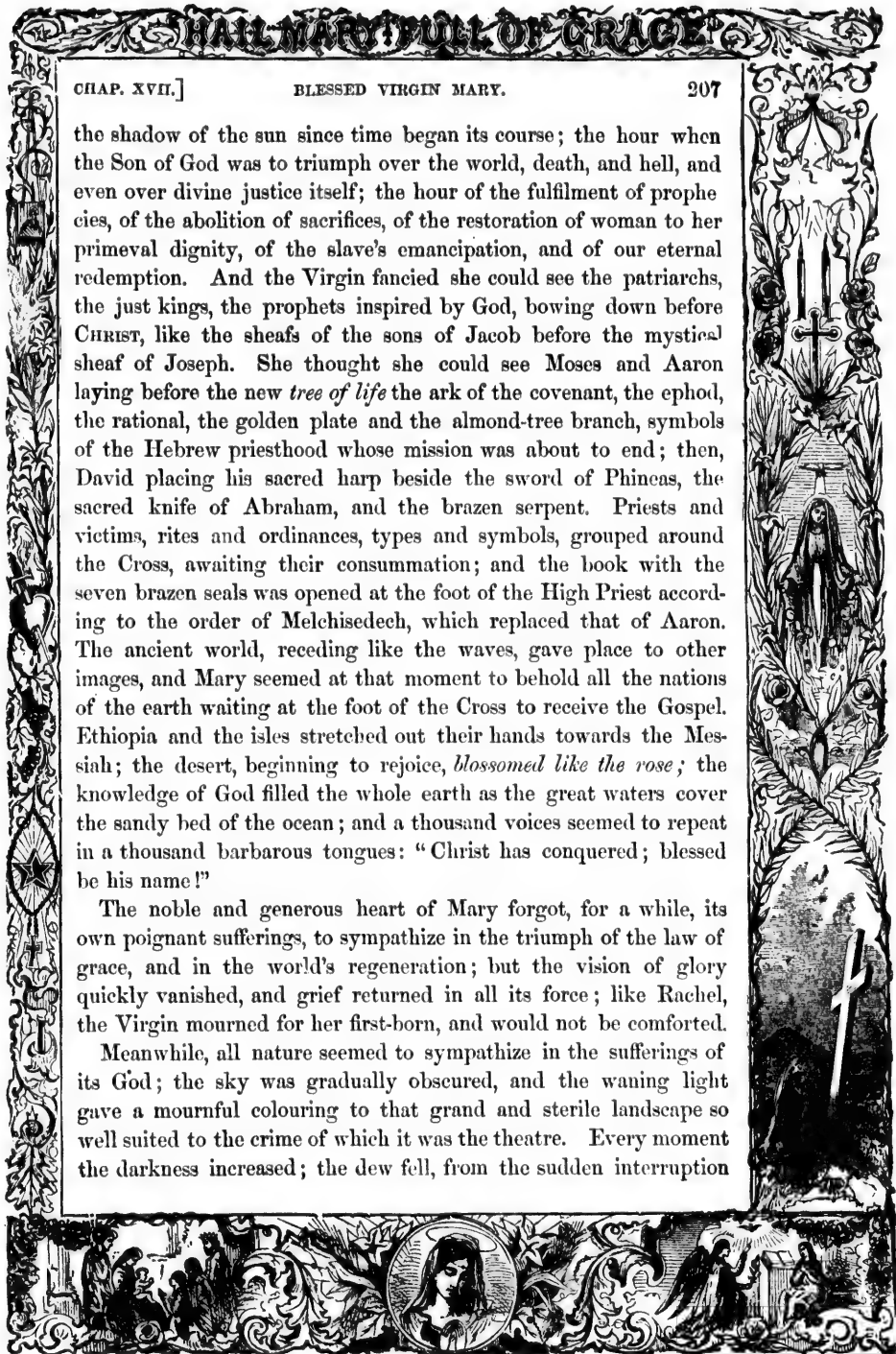
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

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the shadow of the sun since time began its course; the hour when the Son of God was to triumph over the world, death, and hell, and even over divine justice itself; the hour of the fulfilment of prophecies, of the abolition of sacrifices, of the restoration of woman to her primeval dignity, of the slave's emancipation, and of our eternal redemption. And the Virgin fancied she could see the patriarchs, the just kings, the prophets inspired by God, bowing down before CHRIST, like the sheafs of the sons of Jacob before the mystical sheaf of Joseph. She thought she could see Moses and Aaron laying before the new *tree of life* the ark of the covenant, the ephod, the rational, the golden plate and the almond-tree branch, symbols of the Hebrew priesthood whose mission was about to end; then, David placing his sacred harp beside the sword of Phineas, the sacred knife of Abraham, and the brazen serpent. Priests and victims, rites and ordinances, types and symbols, grouped around the Cross, awaiting their consummation; and the book with the seven brazen seals was opened at the foot of the High Priest according to the order of Melchisedech, which replaced that of Aaron. The ancient world, receding like the waves, gave place to other images, and Mary seemed at that moment to behold all the nations of the earth waiting at the foot of the Cross to receive the Gospel. Ethiopia and the isles stretched out their hands towards the Messiah; the desert, beginning to rejoice, *blossomed like the rose*; the knowledge of God filled the whole earth as the great waters cover the sandy bed of the ocean; and a thousand voices seemed to repeat in a thousand barbarous tongues: "Christ has conquered; blessed be his name!"

The noble and generous heart of Mary forgot, for a while, its own poignant sufferings, to sympathize in the triumph of the law of grace, and in the world's regeneration; but the vision of glory quickly vanished, and grief returned in all its force; like Rachel, the Virgin mourned for her first-born, and would not be comforted.

Meanwhile, all nature seemed to sympathize in the sufferings of its God; the sky was gradually obscured, and the waning light gave a mournful colouring to that grand and sterile landscape so well suited to the crime of which it was the theatre. Every moment the darkness increased; the dew fell, from the sudden interruption



of the heat; the eagles screamed as they sought their nightly shelter; the jackals howled on the banks of the Kedron, and Calvary, already so gloomy in itself, assumed the appearance of a great mausoleum of black marble. The people, strongly impressed by this unusual occurrence, were struck silent with fear, and only a few voices—those of the chief priests and Pharisees—continued to curse the CHRIST.

Soon, through the gloomy veil which shrouded the face of the firmament, the stars shone out like funereal torches burning around a coffin, shedding over the scene of the deicide a lurid, greenish light, which gave to the mass of spectators grouped on the sides of the mountain, the appearance of an assembly of demons and spectres. They looked at each other and grew pale. Vainly did the scribes and Pharisees—too far advanced in crime to attempt to recede—endeavour to account for this prodigy by natural means; the longer the darkness continued, the less conclusive did their reasons appear. Old men, shaking their hoary heads, declared they had never beheld such an eclipse, and the learned, who were versed in the science of the Chaldeans, maintained, on the other hand, that no eclipse was either foreseen or possible in the then position of the moon.*

This eclipse of three hours was one of the Messianic prodigies which were to signalize the wrath of heaven when Christ was put to death. "*It shall come to pass in that day,*" said the prophet Amos, "*that the sun shall go down at mid-day; and I will make the earth dark in the day of light.*" This darkness extended even to Egypt, where St. Denis, the Areopagite, was studying philosophy at Heliopolis. Struck with terror, the young Greek cried out, addressing his preceptor, Apollophanes: "*Either the world is about to be destroyed, or the God of nature suffers!*"†

* Phlegon relates that in the two hundred and second Olympiad, corresponding with the 33rd year of our era, there was the greatest eclipse of the sun ever seen, and that the stars appeared at noonday; but astronomy proving that there was no eclipse in that year, compels us to acknowledge that the cause of this unheard of darkness was altogether supernatural. "We observed," says St. Denis the Areopagite, who was then at Heliopolis, "that the moon suddenly interposed between the sun and the earth, although the time of that conjunction was not in accordance with the natural order of the laws to which the stars are subject," etc. (*Seventh Epistle to Polycarpe.*)

† *Ibid.*



In the midst of the general consternation, Jesus occupied himself with the faithful souls who gathered around his Cross in that hour of ignominy. Touched by the courage of John, and the profound affliction which that young and ardent disciple sought not to conceal, he would leave him a pledge of his divine affection. He could leave him no worldly wealth, he, who had not had a stone whereon to lay his head, and who was even about to receive interment from the charity of a disciple; he had nothing in the world to leave but his mother! that mother who had clung to him through every trial, and who was now dying, as it were, with him. Her he solemnly bequeathed to his favourite disciple as an earnest of the celestial treasures which he reserved for him in the kingdom of his Father. Knowing how well he was loved by those two holy souls, he foresaw, in his adorable goodness, the fearful vacuum which his death would make in their hearts, and he would strengthen these two helpless shrubs by intertwining their detached branches.

By this arrangement, which gave her a new and dear interest in life, the Virgin was to understand that she was not permitted to follow her son to the grave, and that the term of her earthly pilgrimage was not yet arrived. She submitted to the divine will through love for us, whom she adopted in the person of the holy Apostle. Mary's sacrifice, humanly speaking, almost equalled that of Christ. He willingly consented to die; she to live! . . . Both those noble hearts were consumed with love for men, and were alone able to understand each other; for their thoughts were not as our thoughts, and the gold of their virtues was without alloy.

The manner in which Jesus bequeathed Mary to the young fisherman of Bethsaida was dignified and simple like all the acts of his mortal life. "Woman, behold thy son;" and to the beloved disciple, "Behold thy mother."

If he used not, in speaking to Mary, a more endearing appellation, it was because he knew the power of the name which he thought proper to omit, and would not re-open wounds already so deep and so painful.

"Afterwards Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said: *I thirst.*

"Now there was a vessel set there, full of vinegar. And they,



putting a sponge full of vinegar about hyssop, offered it to his mouth."

Revengeful to the last!

Jesus having taken the vinegar, said: "*It is consummated.*" Then, in order to prove to the world that he died, not by the power of death, but by a formal act of his own will, he gave a loud cry, bowed down his head and expired! . . .

At that moment the pagan idols tottered on their pedestals; the star of Moses, which had shone but for one single point of the globe, and that but for a season,—sank then below the horizon, and the sun of the gospel, destined to light the world from pole to pole and to last through all time, arose radiant from the east. But God owed prodigies to the despised dignity of his Son, and they were not slow in coming. The supernatural darkness, as it began to disappear, was succeeded by the violent shocks of an earthquake which destroyed twenty cities in Asia.* At the same instant, the veil of the temple was rent asunder, rocks split, and several bodies of the saints who had slept in death arose and came into Jerusalem, to the great terror of the inhabitants.

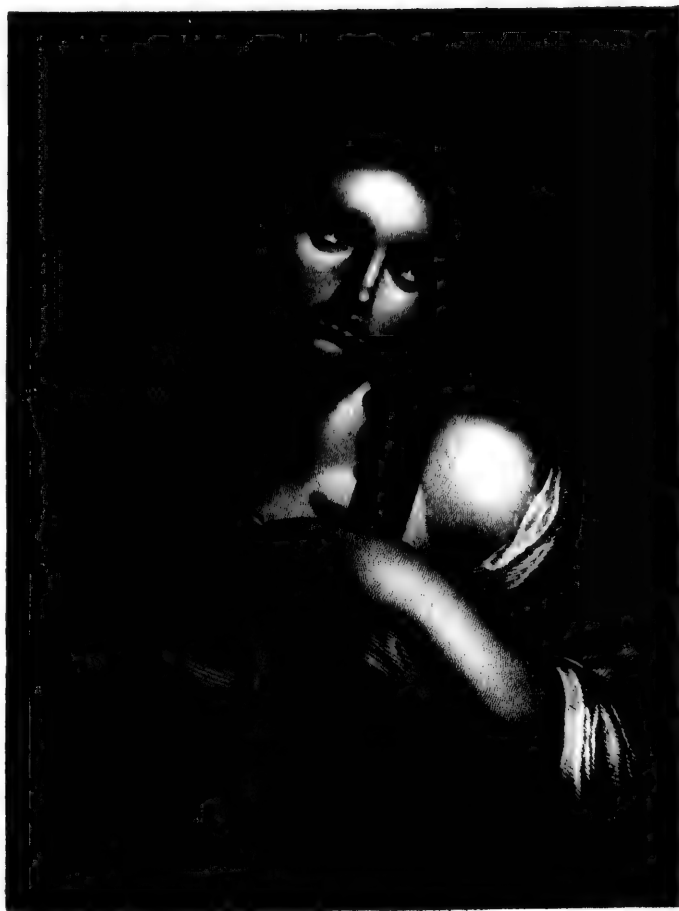
Then it was that there was a marvellous reaction in favour of Jesus; the centurion and his soldiers, who had presided at the execution, cried out with one voice that the Nazarene prophet was certainly more than man, and that immense crowd of people who had heaped blasphemies and insults, mockery and derision on Christ in his agony, went down from the mountain striking their breasts, and repeating in dismay: **INDEED THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD!**

In the midst of the despairing cries of the people who fled in all directions without knowing where to turn their steps, and whilst the rocky flanks of the Golgotha were bursting open, there was seen by the pale, lurid light, a woman standing completely motionless amid the convulsions and ruins of nature. She seemed insensible to the general consternation; her hands joined in the attitude of prayer, she was wholly absorbed in the sorrowful contemplation of the crucified prophet.

* Pliny and Strabo speak of this earthquake. "It was so violent," say both these authors, "that it was felt even in Italy."







J. M. S. M. 1877.

1877.



And the daughters of Jerusalem wept again, saying with compassion: "Poor mother!

Towards evening the Pharisees, unwilling that the sanctity of the Sabbath, which commenced at nightfall, should be endangered by allowing the bodies to remain on the cross, went to ask Pilate's permission to have them removed. The permission obtained, they placed ladders against the gibbets whereon the two thieves were still in their agony, and, having rudely torn their hands and feet from the cross, dispatched them by breaking their legs and arms. Jesus being quite dead,* a soldier contented himself with plunging his spear into his side, whereupon the sacred blood that was to purify the world of its crimes flowed in streams to the ground. At some distance, stood two veiled women, one of whom leaned on the other for support with a helplessness that betrayed the most heart-rending grief; both were timidly watching the movements of the soldiers; it was Mary and Magdalen, for Magdalen was also there; and at a distance were seen the other women of Galilee, who had quitted all for Jesus, and who had not abandoned him even in his hour of death and ignominy. "Honour to them!" says Abeilard, "for, when the disciples and apostles fled like cowards over the mountains, these frail but courageous creatures accompanied Christ even to the foot of the cross, and quitted him not till he was laid in the sepulchre!"

Then came Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy senator who had obtained from Pilate the body of Jesus,—whose disciple he was, in so-

* According to the Mussulmans, Jesus is not dead. "The Jews," says Mahomet, "did not kill Jesus Christ; another body was substituted for his, so as to deceive their barbarity; they did not crucify him; God took him up to heaven."—(*Koran*, ch. 4.) The Mussulman tradition says that when the last trumpet shall sound, *Aisa* (Jesus Christ) shall come down from heaven and announce to all the children of men the great day of general judgment; he shall then die and be interred beside Mahomet; when the dead arise from their graves both shall go forth together and ascend to heaven. Burkhart, who visited the great mosque in Medina, which contains the three tombs of Mahomet, Aboubeker, and Omar, all three of black stone covered with precious stuffs, and surrounded with magnificent *ex-voto*, says that there was left near the tomb of Mahomet a vacant place, destined to receive Jesus after his death. Above this space and Mahomet's tomb, was hung a splendid brocade canopy, garnished with diamonds, which was stolen by Sioud, when he took Medina.



cret,—in order to give him decent burial. He took it down from the cross and prepared to wrap it up in a shroud of fine Egyptian linen, which he had purchased in Jerusalem, when he saw at his feet a woman pale as death, holding out her arms with all the touching and sublime energy of grief, to receive the crucified God. Her whole frame was convulsed with anguish, and her lips refused to utter the prayer that arose from her heart, but every feature of her beautiful face was expressive of the most earnest supplication. The senator, recognizing Mary, made a sign of compassionate sympathy, and laid on her trembling knees the divine burden which he had respectfully borne on his own shoulders. Thus, the Blessed Virgin had, at length, the mournful consolation of pressing to her bleeding heart the disfigured body of her son, and to lay her bloodless lips on the wounds made by the nails. Magdalen, on her knees, bathed with her scalding tears the bloody feet of her Lord, and moaned like a wounded dove. Behind them stood the weeping women of Galilee.* Meanwhile, some of Joseph's servants prepared the perfumes on the *stone of unction*,† and others opened the sepulchre hewn in the rock, which was to receive the mortal remains of the Son of God.

* Some authors hold that these holy women picked up earth soaked with the precious blood of Jesus, and that this is how it came to be held in some French churches, such as St. Denis and the Holy Chapel, in Paris.

† The stone of unction is now in the chapel of Calvary; they have been obliged, in order to preserve it, to cover it with white marble and surround it with an iron balustrade.







CHAPTER XVIII.

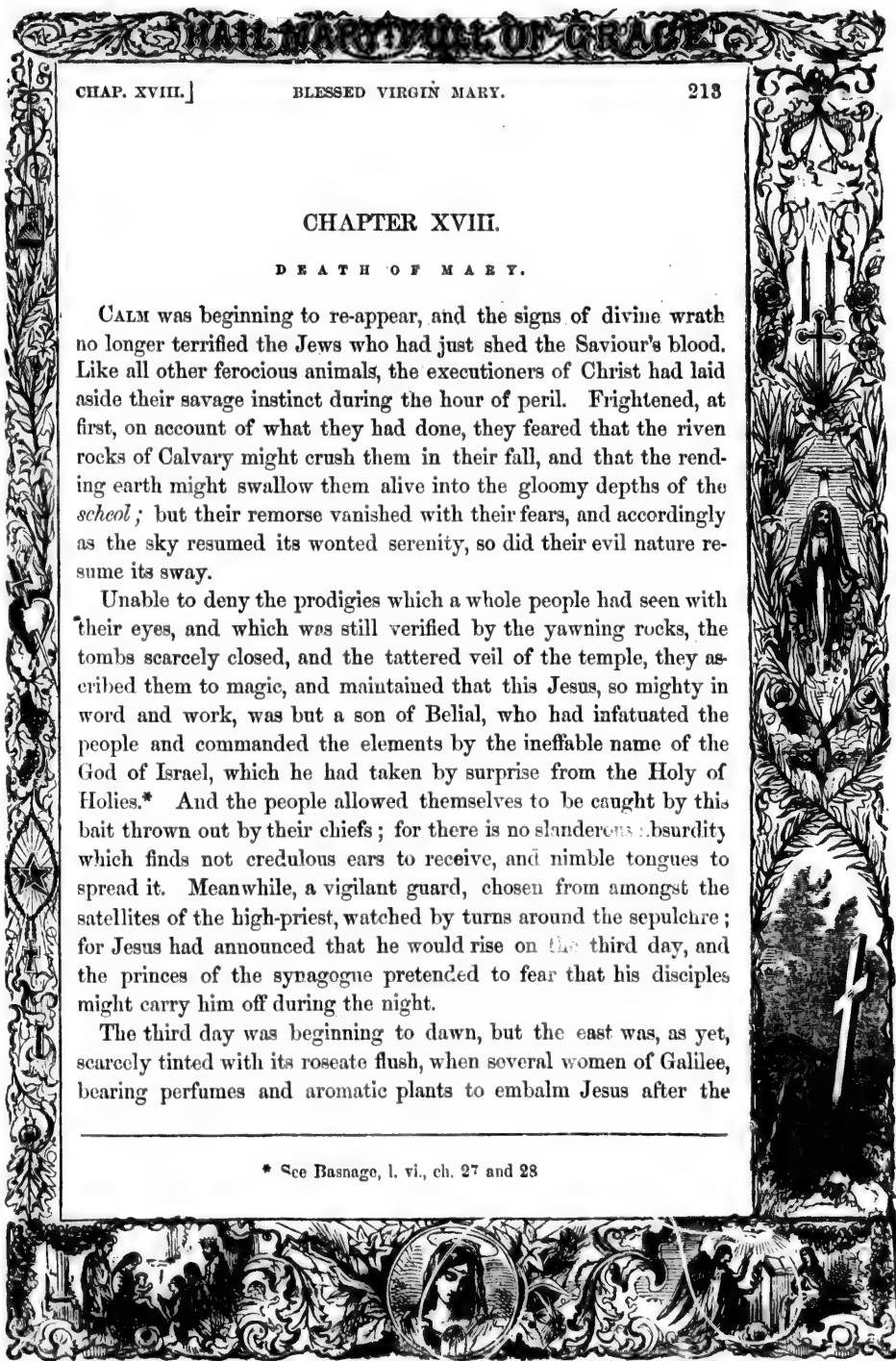
DEATH OF MARY.

CALM was beginning to re-appear, and the signs of divine wrath no longer terrified the Jews who had just shed the Saviour's blood. Like all other ferocious animals, the executioners of Christ had laid aside their savage instinct during the hour of peril. Frightened, at first, on account of what they had done, they feared that the riven rocks of Calvary might crush them in their fall, and that the rending earth might swallow them alive into the gloomy depths of the *scheol*; but their remorse vanished with their fears, and accordingly as the sky resumed its wonted serenity, so did their evil nature resume its sway.

Unable to deny the prodigies which a whole people had seen with their eyes, and which was still verified by the yawning rocks, the tombs scarcely closed, and the tattered veil of the temple, they ascribed them to magic, and maintained that this Jesus, so mighty in word and work, was but a son of Belial, who had infatuated the people and commanded the elements by the ineffable name of the God of Israel, which he had taken by surprise from the Holy of Holies.* And the people allowed themselves to be caught by this bait thrown out by their chiefs; for there is no slanderous absurdity which finds not credulous ears to receive, and nimble tongues to spread it. Meanwhile, a vigilant guard, chosen from amongst the satellites of the high-priest, watched by turns around the sepulchre; for Jesus had announced that he would rise on the third day, and the princes of the synagogue pretended to fear that his disciples might carry him off during the night.

The third day was beginning to dawn, but the east was, as yet, scarcely tinted with its roseate flush, when several women of Galilee, bearing perfumes and aromatic plants to embalm Jesus after the

* See Basnage, l. vi., ch. 27 and 28



manner of the kings of Juda,* appeared on the fatal mountain, moving pensively towards the garden wherein was the tomb of Christ. Tradition has it that Mary was amongst these holy women. Her dejected countenance resembled some beautiful ruin prostrated by the fierce wind of adversity; but her look was expressive not only of grief, but of expectation. The deicide city still slept in the balmy breeze of the morning; the flowers were opening their cups heavy with dew, the birds were singing in the damp branches of the wild fig trees, and the air was gradually assuming the warm colouring of the dawn; nature seemed to assume her robe of light with unwonted joy, and that grand, though gloomy landscape which surrounds Jerusalem, began to wear a softer and gayer aspect, till then unknown, as though conscious of some glorious mystery passing near.

Suddenly, in the midst of that smiling scene, a shock was felt; the stone which closes the mouth of the sepulchre rolls back as if pushed by some mighty arm; the guards fall stupefied to the ground, and the women, who stood by Jesus during his long agony on the cross, now shudder and grow pale, fearing that the terrible prodigies which accompanied the death of the Son of Man are about to be renewed.

But an angel in snow-white garments, with a face radiant as the lightning, appears sitting on the stone, and reassures the servants of Christ. "Fear not," said he, mildly, "I know that you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified; he is not here; he is risen, as he told you. Come and see the place where the Lord was laid." Whilst the pious Galileans looked timidly into the sepulchre, wondering at sight of the shroud and the perfumed bands which remained there, the Virgin, her face radiant with a holy joy, stood leaning against an olive tree at some distance. A young man, in the homely garb of the people, stood conversing with her in a low voice. That young man was the *first-born amongst the dead*, the glorious conqueror of hell, Jesus Christ.† No one knew what

* It is clear that they intended a peculiar sort of enbalming for Jesus, since Nicodemus had already wrapped him up in bands perfumed with myrrh.

† St. Ambrose, who lived in the fourth century, says that the Virgin was the first who had the happiness of seeing Jesus after his resurrection; and the poet Sedulius,



passed during that solemn interview; but we may believe that Mary, whose strong mind had been so severely tried by affliction, felt then a degree of bliss which we cannot know without dying.

Our Lord, during the forty days following his resurrection, frequently manifested himself to the Apostles, and talked with them on matters appertaining to the kingdom of God and the regeneration to be wrought amongst men by baptism. Pious authors have supposed that the Virgin was the most favoured in these consoling apparitions, and that she found in them a foretaste of the joys of heaven. The bitter waters of her affliction were changed into sources of grace, and the Saviour *nourished her with the hidden manna which he reserves for those who practise the patience enjoined by his law.*

At length, the hour came when the Son of God was to be recalled to heaven; his redeeming mission was accomplished, and the Apostles, fully convinced of his divinity by his resurrection, had received from him the necessary instructions for converting the nations to his admirable Gospel.

At noon, on the fortieth day, he went out with them from Jerusalem towards the heights of Bethany. This direction was not taken by chance; there was that olive-crowned mountain whereon the Saviour, detaching himself from the crowd, had often prayed to his Father, while the silent moon shone brightly over the still waters of the Dead Sea, the green valley of the Jordan, and the gigantic palms of the plain of Jericho, for in that elevated position "all far things seemed near." There was, also, that famous garden wherein Christ had undergone the first of his agony. It was just that his glory should commence in the same places that had witnessed his generous sufferings, and that those fields, those woods, those shady wilds, where he had so often prayed and meditated, should receive the impression of his last footsteps before he re-ascended into heaven.

who flourished shortly after St. Ambrose, likewise introduces that tradition into his poems. They both speak of it as a belief general amongst Christians. The Arab historians have preserved this tradition: Ismael, son of Ali, relates that Jesus came down from heaven to console Mary, his weeping mother. An altar has been erected on the site of this touching interview.



Arrived on the summit of that lofty mountain, whence he could behold a great part of Judea, and make a farewell sign to those scenes which he had rendered famous by his miracles and his death, the Saviour stopped on an open place, near a grove of olives whose pale foliage was parched and shrivelled by the scorching noonday sun. There, after raising his pierced hands towards his heavenly Father, as though recommending to Him his infant Church, he extended them over his mother and his disciples, as Jacob did over the sons of Joseph; then lifted himself up by his own power and slowly ascended into heaven. This last act of the Saviour worthily sealed his divine mission. During his life, *he went about doing good*; on Calvary, he prayed for his executioners; and he ascended to heaven blessing the humble friends whom he left behind him on the earth. While his hands were still raised over his prostrate disciples, they saw him enter a white cloud which concealed him from their view.

The ascension of our Lord had not that gloomy and awful character which terrified the people in ancient times. The law of Moses had been proclaimed with sound of trumpet, amid the thunder's roar and the lightning's flash; Elias had been taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot; but the world's Redeemer was gently borne on a fleecy cloud, with that sort of calm and serene majesty which accorded with the genius of the Gospel and the touching character of its author.

The angels—those beneficent spirits who rejoice in the happiness of men—were also seen to figure in that closing scene of the great drama of Redemption. Their divine songs had announced to the shepherds the birth of the king-Messiah; their voice had proclaimed his resurrection from the dead; it was proper, then, that their words should confirm his glorious ascension.

Whilst the disciples were attentively watching Jesus as he ascended into heaven, two men clothed in white stood suddenly before them, and said: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking up to heaven? This Jesus, who is taken up from you to heaven, shall so come as you have seen him going into heaven."

The Apostles and disciples cast down their eyes, dazzled by the glorious vision, but did the Virgin cast down hers? Was she



denied the privilege of seeing her divine Son take his place in majesty at the right hand of Jehovah, amid the inaccessible light of the Saints? Was she really less favoured than St. Stephen and the beloved disciple? That is scarcely possible. She who was morally crucified with Jesus on Calvary deserved to be glorified with him; it was her right, and she had dearly purchased it! Yes, Mary must have been permitted to catch a glimpse of that peaceful and happy country into which Jesus obtained admission for us by his blood, and where he himself wipes away the tears of the just;* then the pearl gates of the heavenly Jerusalem† slowly closed on the conquering God, and the Virgin, separated for a time from him she loved, remained alone on the earth.

Forty days after, we find her at prayer in the "upper chamber," where she received the Holy Ghost with the Apostles.

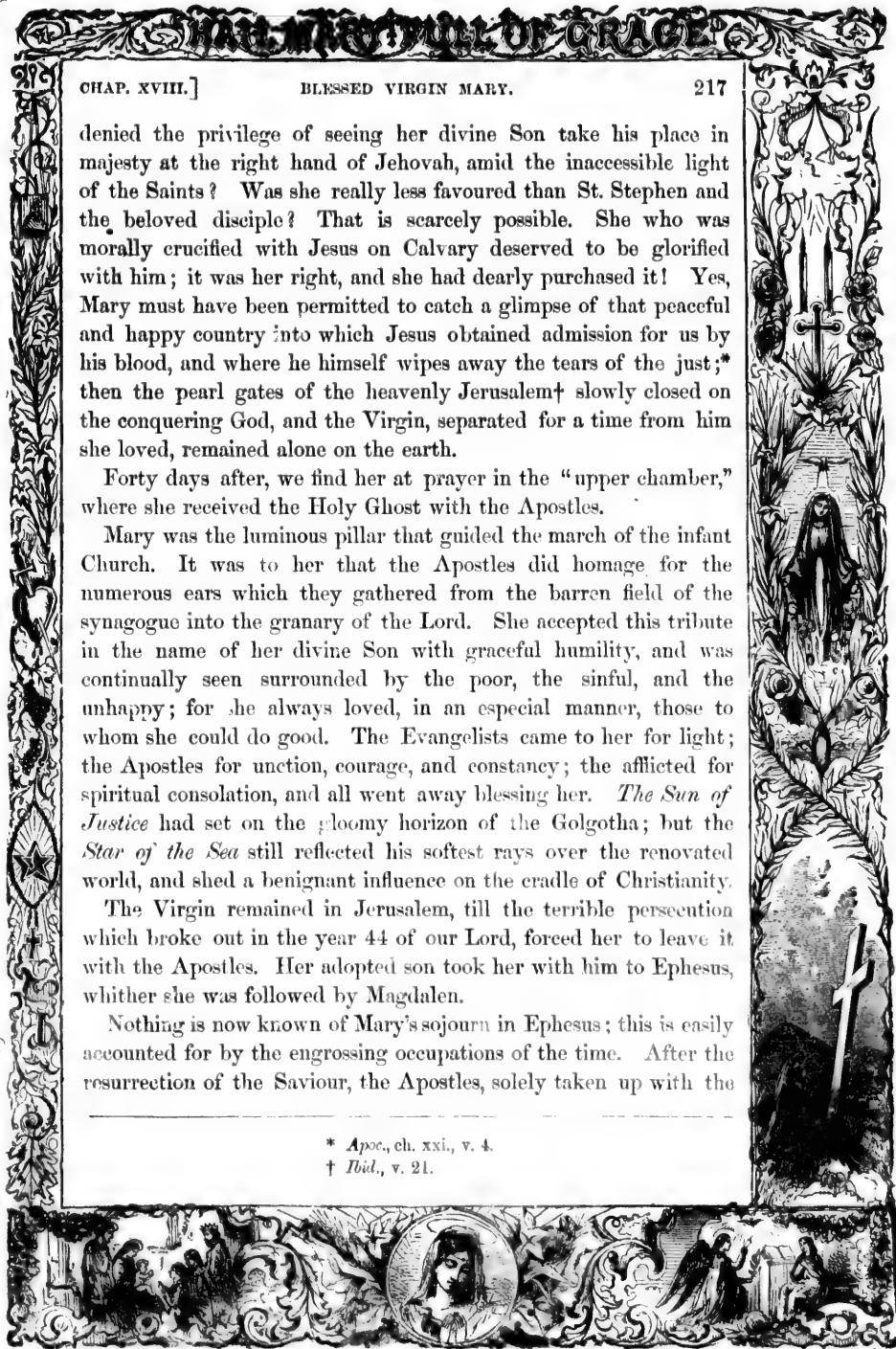
Mary was the luminous pillar that guided the march of the infant Church. It was to her that the Apostles did homage for the numerous ears which they gathered from the barren field of the synagogue into the granary of the Lord. She accepted this tribute in the name of her divine Son with graceful humility, and was continually seen surrounded by the poor, the sinful, and the unhappy; for she always loved, in an especial manner, those to whom she could do good. The Evangelists came to her for light; the Apostles for unction, courage, and constancy; the afflicted for spiritual consolation, and all went away blessing her. *The Sun of Justice* had set on the gloomy horizon of the Golgotha; but the *Star of the Sea* still reflected his softest rays over the renovated world, and shed a benignant influence on the cradle of Christianity.

The Virgin remained in Jerusalem, till the terrible persecution which broke out in the year 44 of our Lord, forced her to leave it with the Apostles. Her adopted son took her with him to Ephesus, whither she was followed by Magdalen.

Nothing is now known of Mary's sojourn in Ephesus; this is easily accounted for by the engrossing occupations of the time. After the resurrection of the Saviour, the Apostles, solely taken up with the

* Apoc., ch. xxi., v. 4.

† Ibid., v. 21.





propagation of the faith, considered everything as of minor importance that did not immediately bear on that all-absorbing object. Full of their lofty mission, entirely devoted to the salvation of souls, they forgot themselves so completely that they have barely left us a few unfinished records of the evangelical labours which changed the face of the globe; so that their history resembles a sublime but almost effaced epitaph, having neither beginning nor end. That the mother of Jesus shared the fate of the Apostles may well be conceived; the last years of her life having flown away, far from Jerusalem, in a strange land, where her dwelling was signalized by no striking incident, have left no durable impression on the fleeting memory of man. Nevertheless, the flourishing condition of the church of Ephesus, its tender devotion to Mary, and the praise which St. Paul bestows on its piety, sufficiently indicate the fruitful cares of the Virgin, and the divine blessing which followed her everywhere. The Rose of Jesse left a portion of her perfume on the air, and that vestige, however slight it be, is a precious revelation of her passage.

The coasts of Asia Minor, covered with opulent cities, rich in vegetation and washed by a sea which bore thither a multitude of vessels, would have seemed, to ordinary exiles, a splendid compensation for the tall, bleak mountains of Palestine. It is doubtful whether such was the opinion of the Virgin of Nazareth: the steps of the Man-God had not hallowed that enchanted land, and the graves of her fathers were not there! . . .

How often did Mary and Magdalen sigh for their native land, as, seated under a plane-tree on the margin of that fair Icarian sea whose waves die away amid myrtles on the narrow sandy beach, they followed the course of some Greek galley bound for Syria! The stainless snows of Lebanon, the blueish peaks of Carmel, the sparkling waters of the lake of Tiberias, were each, in turn, the subject of their discourse; the scenes of their own land, embellished by distance, passed successively before them, and seemed a thousand times preferable to that soft, luxurious Ionia which was, in fact, to the land of Jehovah what the lyre of Anacreon is to the harp of David.

It was during her stay at Ephesus that the Virgin lost the faith-



ful companion who, in imitation of Ruth, had left her home and kindred to follow her across the sea: Magdalen died, and Mary wept for her as Jesus had wept for Lazarus.*

Of all the ties of kindred and affection, St. John alone remained to the Virgin,—St. John, the kind and loving disciple whom her dying Son had bequeathed to her; she followed him, it is thought, in his travels, and it was, doubtless, in his conversations with the Queen of prophets that St. John acquired the marvellous knowledge which he displays in his Gospel. Assisted by light from Her whom the Fathers have compared to the golden candlestick with seven branches, the young fisherman of Bethsaida dived deeper than any other into the incomprehensible mystery of the uncreated essence of the Word, and his mind took so bold a flight amid the mysterious heights of heaven that, compared with him, the other Evangelists seem but to skim the earth.†

Meanwhile, the sowers of Christ had sowed the good seed of the word over every part of the Roman world; the evangelical harvest was green, and the labourers of the Lord worked with ardour in the sacred field. Mary considered that her mission on earth was accomplished, and that the Church could henceforward maintain herself. Then, like a tired workwoman who seeks rest and shelter during the heat of the day, she began to sigh after the cool shade of the tree of life which grows near the throne of God, and for the

* We read in some Greek authors of the seventh and following centuries, that, after the ascension of Christ, St. Mary Magdalen accompanied the Virgin and St. John to Ephesus; and that she died and was buried in that city. Such is also the opinion of Modestus, patriarch of Jerusalem, who flourished in 920; of St. Gregory, of Tours, and of St. Willebald. The latter, in his account of his journey from Jerusalem, says that he saw at Ephesus the tomb of St. Mary Magdalen. The Emperor Leo, the philosopher, had the relics of the saint translated from Ephesus to Constantinople, where they were placed in the church of St. Lazarus, about the year 890.—Another tradition, maintained by some respectable authors, will have it that St. Mary Magdalen ended her days in Provence; we have adopted the contrary opinion, because it seemed more probable, but yet without attempting to decide the question.

† The Abbé Rupert (*in Cant. Cant.*) states that the Blessed Virgin supplied by her lights what the Holy Ghost, who had given himself in proportion to the disciples, had not thought proper to reveal to them, and the Holy Fathers all agree that it was from the Blessed Virgin St. Luke obtained many of his marvellous and minute particulars of the infancy of Jesus Christ.



living, sanctifying waters which flow beneath its branches.* This desire of his mother was known to Him who fathoms the depths of the soul, and the angel who stands at his right hand came to inform the future Queen of heaven that her Son had granted her wish.†

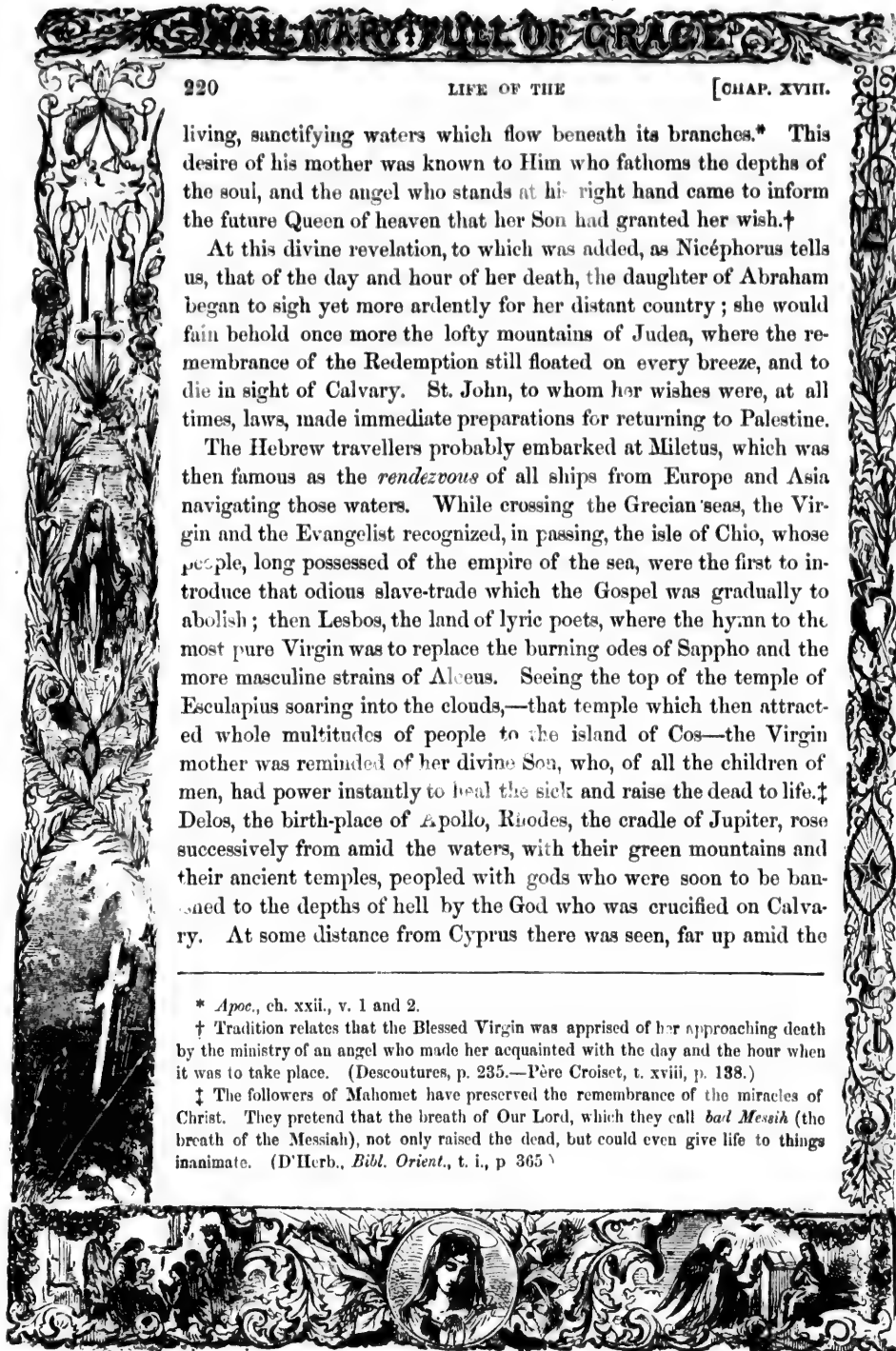
At this divine revelation, to which was added, as Nicéphorus tells us, that of the day and hour of her death, the daughter of Abraham began to sigh yet more ardently for her distant country; she would fain behold once more the lofty mountains of Judea, where the remembrance of the Redemption still floated on every breeze, and to die in sight of Calvary. St. John, to whom her wishes were, at all times, laws, made immediate preparations for returning to Palestine.

The Hebrew travellers probably embarked at Miletus, which was then famous as the *rendezvous* of all ships from Europe and Asia navigating those waters. While crossing the Grecian seas, the Virgin and the Evangelist recognized, in passing, the isle of Chio, whose people, long possessed of the empire of the sea, were the first to introduce that odious slave-trade which the Gospel was gradually to abolish; then Lesbos, the land of lyric poets, where the hymn to the most pure Virgin was to replace the burning odes of Sappho and the more masculine strains of Alceus. Seeing the top of the temple of Esculapius soaring into the clouds,—that temple which then attracted whole multitudes of people to the island of Cos—the Virgin mother was reminded of her divine Son, who, of all the children of men, had power instantly to heal the sick and raise the dead to life.‡ Delos, the birth-place of Apollo, Rhodes, the cradle of Jupiter, rose successively from amid the waters, with their green mountains and their ancient temples, peopled with gods who were soon to be banished to the depths of hell by the God who was crucified on Calvary. At some distance from Cyprus there was seen, far up amid the

* *Apoc.*, ch. xxii., v. 1 and 2.

† Tradition relates that the Blessed Virgin was apprised of her approaching death by the ministry of an angel who made her acquainted with the day and the hour when it was to take place. (Descoutures, p. 235.—Père Croiset, t. xviii., p. 138.)

‡ The followers of Mahomet have preserved the remembrance of the miracles of Christ. They pretend that the breath of Our Lord, which they call *bad Messih* (the breath of the Messiah), not only raised the dead, but could even give life to things inanimate. (D'Herb., *Bibl. Orient.*, t. i., p. 365.)



clouds, a dark point traced on the blue dome of heaven; it was the mount whereon the prophet Elias had of old erected an altar to the future mother of the Saviour, and where his disciples were then about to place themselves under her special protection. Next day, the galley entered a port of Syria—Sidon, perhaps—its commercial intercourse being frequent with Palestine, as seen by the sacred books.

They returned to Israel after an absence of several years. Mary withdrew to the mountain of Sion, within a short distance of the ruinous and deserted palace of the princes of *the East*, to the house which had been sanctified by the descent of the Holy Ghost. St. John, on his side, went to seek St. James, the cousin of the Virgin and the first bishop of Jerusalem, to *the city*, as well as the faithful who composed his already numerous church of Jerusalem, that the mother of Jesus had returned to die amongst them.

The day and the hour were come; the saints of Jerusalem once more beheld the daughter of David, still poor, still fair, still humble; for one would have said that this admirable and holy creature escaped the destroying action of time, and that, predestined from her birth to a complete and glorious immortality, nothing in her was to perish.* Serious, but not sick, she received the Apostles and disciples seated on a small bed of mean appearance, suited to her unpretending garments. There was in her modest yet noble mien something so solemn and so touching that the whole assembly burst into tears. Mary alone was calm, though the vast chamber was crowded with old disciples and new Christians, all equally anxious to see and hear her.

The night had fallen, and lamps, with many branches, seemed to shed, with their pale light, something solemn and mysterious over that sad and silent assembly. The Apostles, deeply moved, stood close around the bed of death. St. Peter, who had so tenderly loved the Son of God during his life, contemplated the Virgin mother with profound sorrow, and his speaking glance seemed to say to the bishop of Jerusalem, "How much she resembles Christ!"

* St. Denis, an eye witness of the death of the Blessed Virgin, affirms that, at that advanced period of her life, she was still strikingly beautiful.





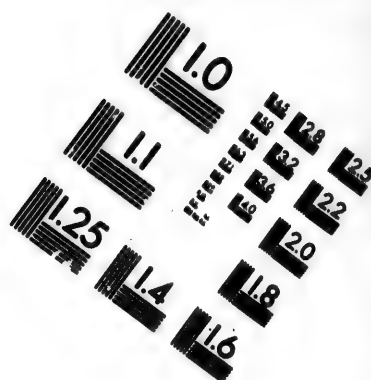
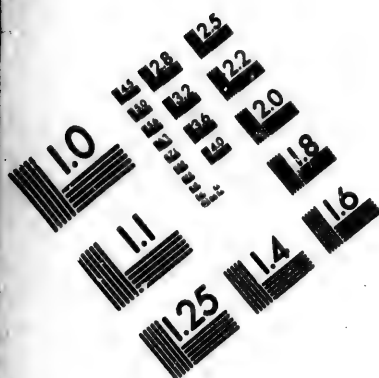
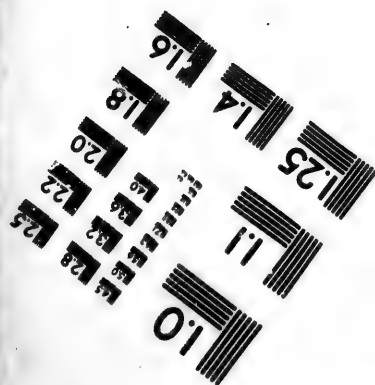
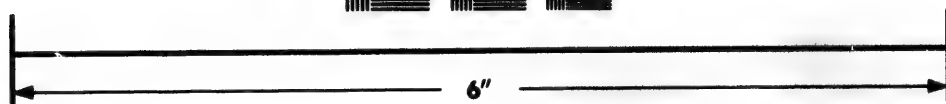
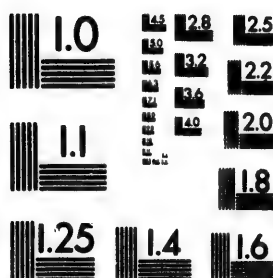


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In fact, there was a remarkable likeness;* and the bowed head of Mary, recalling that of the Saviour during the last Supper, finished the effect. St. James, who had received from the Jews themselves the surname of *Just*, and who well knew how to subdue his feelings, sternly repressed the tears which moistened his eyelids. The Prince of the Apostles—a frank and impulsive man—was deeply affected, and strove not to conceal his emotion; St. John had wrapped a fold of his Greek mantle around his head, but his sobs betrayed him. There was not, in all the crowd, a heart unmoved, or an eye unmoistened by a tear. Mary, sympathizing in the general emotion, and almost forgetting the splendour which awaited her on high, in order to wipe away the tears of those who loved her, applied herself to confirm the faith of her children, to revive their pious hopes, and to inflame their charity; she told them with unequalled eloquence of those mighty and sublime things which people hold their breath to hear, which raise man above himself, and render him capable of any undertaking. Her speech, so mild that the Scripture has compared it to a honeycomb, became gradually strong; the daughter of David and of Solomon, the inspired prophetess who had extemporaneously composed the triumphal hymn of the *Magnificat*, soared up to considerations so high that the listeners forgot, in their ecstasy, that death was to close that mystic strain. But the fatal hour approached. Mary extended her protecting hands over the poor orphans whom she was about to quit, and, raising her beautiful eyes to the stars which shone brightly in the firmament, she saw the heavens open, and the Son of man extending his arms towards her from amidst a luminous cloud.† At this sight, a roseate flush overspread her face, her eyes sparkled with maternal love, joy attained its height, adoration became ecstatic, and her soul, disengaging itself without an effort from its fair and virginal covering, fell gently into the bosom of God.‡

* Jesus hung his head a little, which took something from his height; his face had much resemblance to that of his mother, especially in the lower part. (Nic., *Hist. Eccles.*, t. i., p. 125.)

† St. John Damascene.

‡ Some ancient Fathers, and, amongst others, St. Epiphanius, seem to doubt

Mary was no more, but her countenance, which had assumed the expression of a tranquil slumber, was so sweet to look upon that it seemed as though death hesitated to set his seal on that trophy which he was only to retain for a day.

The death-lamp was lit; the windows were all thrown open, and the summer breezes made its way into the room with the flickering beams of the stars. One would have said that a miraculous light filled the room when Mary had drawn her last sigh: it was, perhaps, the glory of God which surrounded the spotless soul of the predestined Virgin. When the death of Mary was no longer doubtful, there was nothing heard, at first, but tears and lamentations; then, the funeral chant arose on the stillness of the night; the angels chimed in with their golden harps,* and the echoes of David's mouldering palace sadly repeated the wail over the tombs of the kings of Juda.

On the following day, the faithful brought in, with pious profusion the most precious perfumes and the richest stuffs for the burial of the Queen of Virgins. They embalmed her according to the custom of her people, but her blessed remains exhaled a sweeter odour than the perfumed bands wherewith she was bound. The preparations being duly completed, the sacred body of the mother of God

whether the mother of God really died, or whether she remained immortal, being taken body and soul to heaven; but the opinion of the Church is, that the Blessed Virgin did really die according to the condition of the flesh, and this opinion is clearly manifested in the Mass for the feast of the Assumption. The Blessed Virgin died during the night which precedes the 15th of August. The date of her death is very uncertain. Eusebius fixes it in the year 48 of our era; so that, according to him, Mary lived sixty-eight years; but Nicephorus (b. xi., ch. 21,) formally says that she died in the fifth year of the reign of Claudius, that is to say, in the year of Rome 798, or 45 of the Christian era. Then, supposing that the Blessed Virgin was sixteen years old when the Saviour was born, she would have lived sixty-one years. Hippolytus of Thebes states, in his chronicle, that the Blessed Virgin became a mother at the age of sixteen, and died eleven years after Jesus Christ. According to some other authors, the Virgin was sixty-six when she died.

* "All the host of heaven," says St. Jerome, "came to meet the mother of God, at the moment of her death, singing hymns and canticles which were heard by all present. *Militiam celorum, cum suis agminibus, festive obviam venisse Genetrici Dei cum laudibus et canticis, eamque ingenti lumine circumfulsisse et usque ad tronum perduxisse*

was placed in a portable litter filled with aromatics,* and covered with a sumptuous veil, and the Apostles bore it on their shoulders to the valley of Josaphat.† The Christians of Jerusalem, bearing lighted tapers, and chanting hymns and psalms, followed sadly and reverently the remains of Mary.

Arrived at the place of sepulture, the mournful procession stopped. Through the care of the holy women of Jerusalem, the tomb was deprived of its gloomy aspect, and the sepulchral cave presented to the view only a flowery arbour.‡ The Apostles gently laid down the mortal remains of Mary, and, doing so, they wept. Of all the panegyrics pronounced on that occasion, that of Hierotheus was the most remarkable. St. Denis the Areopagite, who describes the scene as an eye-witness, relates that as he praised the Virgin, the orator was almost beside himself.§

For three days, the Apostles and the faithful watched and prayed beside the sepulchre, where they heard distinctly the sacred concert kept up by the heavenly spirits,|| as though to soothe the last sleep of Mary. One of the Apostles, returning from a distant country, and not having been present at the death of the Virgin, arrived just then: it was St. Thomas, the same who had placed his hand in the wounds of his glorified Master. He hastened to take a last look and to water with his tears the cold remains of the privileged

* Coffins, amongst the Jews, in Mary's time, were a species of litter so contrived that it was easy to carry the dead body; this litter was filled with aromatics. Josephus, describing the interment of Herod the Great, says that his litter was lined with precious stones, that his body reposed on purple, that he had the jewell crown upon his head, and that his whole household followed the litter.

† Metaphrastes relates that the Apostles carried the Virgin to the grave on their shoulders.

‡ Greg. Tur., l. i., *de GL*, ch. 4.

§ *Books of divine names*, ch. 3. These books of St. Denis the Areopagite have been rejected by Protestants, but are not the less authorized by a multitude of proofs from the most ancient Fathers and doctors of the Church, by the third œcumenic council of Constantinople, and many others still.

|| Juvenal, patriarch of Jerusalem, who lived in the fifth century, writing to the Emperor Marcian and the Empress Pulcheria, says that the Apostles, relieving each other, passed day and night with the faithful near the tomb, mingling their canticles with those of the angels, who, for three days, were constantly heard making the most celestial harmony.



woman who had borne in her chaste womb the Supreme Master of Nature. Overcome by his tears and entreaties, the Apostles removed the block of stone from the door of the sepulchre; but they saw within only the still fresh flowers whereon Mary's body had reposed, and her white shroud of Egyptian linen, which shed a delicious fragrance. The pure body of the immaculate Virgin was not a prey for worms; during her life earth and heaven had each a share in that wondrous creature; after her death, heaven took all, and glorified all.*

* A very judicious remark of Godescard comes to the support of the Assumption: it is, that "neither the Latins, nor even the Greeks, so greedy for novelty, and so easily persuaded in regard to relics and legends; no people, in a word, no city, no church, ever boasted of possessing the mortal remains of the Blessed Virgin, nor any portion of her body. Hence, without prescribing a belief in the corporal assumption of Mary into heaven, the Church gives us clearly to understand the opinion to which she inclines." (Godescard, t. xiv., p. 449.)

